

From The Vaults

Reissues, remasters and compilations

To Die For

First authorised compilation from fearless NYC trailblazers serves as an apt introduction. *By Kris Needs*

Suicide

Surrender

★★★★★

Mute/BMG SUICIDECD 06 (CD, 2LP)

Perhaps incredibly, *Surrender* is the first retrospective compilation from New York's visionary outsider duo whose fearless alien bombardments and rooftop serenades realigned the city's cultural skyline at gutter level before presaging the global electronic sound to come.

Alan Vega and Martin Rev had been attracting ignorant hostility since birthing Suicide in 1970, walking a confrontational super-voltage high wire with Vega taking Iggy Pop's confrontational mayhem to fearless extremes and Rev's jazz-motored DIY keyboard incantations, drum machine subliminally spiked by Donna Summer's I Feel Love which he considered "the beginning of a new sensibility in terms of electronics".

When *Suicide* was released in December 1977, no other band had so effectively skewered America's damaged post-Vietnam psyche, capturing the squalor, paranoia and oblivion infesting New York City. Graphically reflecting the filth, funk and madness of lawless ruined streets teeming with junkies, drunks, Viet vets and hustling gangbangers, the duo's unearthly hotwired rockabilly seemed beamed from a distant future galaxy via the East Village's deepest sewer, Rev's primal synthscapes buzzing with subway rumbles, scorched-circuit fizz and

malevolent clatter as Vega's reverbed vocals lurched from whispering sob to searing scream. Such onslaughts were countered by glorious doowop electro-ballads such as Cheree, which conjured the romance in New York's diseased heart of darkness.

In long game terms the most important album of 1977, *Suicide* glowered like a monolith for the future to appreciate what the present could not, presaging musical genres before they were dreamed of. But as Rev says, "Most people said, 'If this is the future, we don't want it.'" The 80s might've seen Suicide produced by Ric Ocasek and championed by Springsteen yet remain New York's forgotten boys through 1980's *Suicide: Alan Vega & Martin Rev*, 1988's *A Way Of Life* and 1992's less successful *Why Be Blue?*, still facing redneck hostility supporting bellowing "alternative rock" outfits fancying themselves as dangerous.

Thanks to broadening musical movements and Blast First/Mute's late 90s reissue campaign, subsequent generations started appreciating Suicide, although 2002's lacerating post-9/11 masterpiece *American Supreme* remains an overlooked dark horse in their catalogue.

Since Vega's 2016 death, it's taken this long for Martin Rev to agree to a compilation for BMG's upgrade campaign that started with *Suicide*'s 2019 reissue and Dream Baby Dream's RSD 12-inch. Wrestled into 16 tracks with Vega's wife-collaborator Liz Lamere, archival cohort Jared Artaud and long-time champion Henry Rollins, it matches well-known classics like Ghost

Rider, Rocket USA and Dream Baby Dream with lesser-known missives such as Dominic Christ from 1988's *A Way Of Life* (its swooning doowop ballad *Surrender* names the set).

There's four from 1980's glistening hi-tech *Suicide: Alan Vega & Martin Rev* (including the menacingly evocative Harlem), two from *American Supreme*, Dream Baby Dream B-side Radiation plus bonus alternative version of Girl and the terrifying Frankie Teardrop in its earliest The Detective Meets The Space Alien incarnation first heard on 2010's 10" series released for Vega's 70th birthday.

Like 2019's Art Of The Album *Suicide* refurbishment, *Surrender* is beautifully remastered by Denis Blackham, its blood-red vinyl incarnation clad in embossed mirror-boarded gatefold supremely designed by Michael Handis and Jared Artaud.

"This gathering of songs is not a 'best of' nor is it a 'definitive' all-you-need-to-know compilation," states Rollins. "It is an introduction that will hopefully compel you to explore the albums." Any Suicide virgins out there need to gorge on *Surrender*, a stellar set, and let the voyage of discovering this most remarkable band commence.

SUICIDE



Q&A

Martin Rev on why he finally gave in to the idea of a Suicide compilation...

Suicide have never authorised a compilation before. How did this one happen?

I've never been crazy about compilations for Suicide. You've got all this stuff on separate albums; keep it that way. Why compress them all into one package? But I kept it open. It took a couple of years after BMG reissued *Suicide* and Dream Baby Dream for *Record Week* (sic) before they were ready to concentrate on the compilation. As I didn't consider it my major endeavour they put together a first template of tracks. It wasn't bad but I said some tracks shouldn't be there and others should be that were less familiar, like *American Supreme*, which has always been under the shade. I wasn't even crazy about adding Dream Baby Dream and Ghost Rider, which is too much like resting on certain laurels. I let it go but didn't feel it necessary because I wanted the set to be rough and edgy with lesser-known stuff than the usual. Everybody else basically agreed,

so it went that way. BMG really have an organised corporate view how they're going to promote this; bit of a Madison Avenue approach with budgets for artwork and videos like we've never had before. I was surprised we were getting stuff like synchs and ads.

Whether they know it or not, many people will have heard Cheree on the Marc Jacobs TV ads.

I didn't expect BMG to be doing any of this stuff but they are, fairly consistently. Usually, you never get more than a first option on an ad but they just picked the option up for a third year, which is unusual.

There's alternative versions of Frankie Teardrop and Girl for diehards.

Frankie Teardrop: The Detective Meets The Space Alien was the first version. That was when we cut it the first time. The next time we came in Alan had a different idea for the lyric. That was the Frankie that we know.

Suicide ended with Alan's death but you must have taken into account his reaction putting together the compilation with Liz and Jared?

Yes, there was a lot of going back and forth on screens. With Alan no longer here Suicide is not a

living group. It's got a finite compass. I could keep the name and get someone else in as a singer but that's out of the question. I'm not interested in that.

What have you got coming up?

I just signed a deal with Bureau B for reissues of my solo albums *To Live* and *Les Nymphes* along with one for these early demo cassettes I used to make at home with ideas for Suicide and things like that. At first, they said the sound could be improved. I said, "Not practical; the sound I sent you is the sound." I've also been working on my next album pretty much daily and it's actually reached demo stage!

Some acts spend their lives trading on past glories but you've always been more concerned with your next work.

If you have any kind of success you can live on that but, for me, the idea to spend time on those things just takes away from something else. Those albums are done so it takes time for that to sort out. Let's see what happens after 100 or 200 years if it's still around. That's not up to me so why spend all that time on it? It's not an adventure. The great journey has always been to go into the unknown!

As told to Kris Needs

Suicide: the
dynamic duo, now
available in
compilation form



SOUL COLLECTOR

By Lois Wilson

From Aylesbury, **SARAH BROWN** was raised on her sisters' Mahalia Jackson and Aretha Franklin records. She honed her expressive voice and range from a young age in the local Pentecostal church then when her parents split she moved with her mum to Luton and at 17 joined The Inspirational Choir Of The Pentecostal First Born Church Of The Living God. One of their featured singers, Brown sang with the group for 10 years, appearing on their 1985 debut album *Sweet Inspiration* and on *Madness* '83 No 2 hit single *Wings Of A Dove*. In the 90s she sung with Incognito, as a part of an ensemble with Quincy Jones at the 25th Montreux Jazz Festival and made up one part of jazz duo Lush Life. An in-demand sessioner, she has also sung with Pink Floyd, George Michael, Stevie Wonder and Simply Red and toured with Roxy Music, Simple Minds and Duran Duran. **Sarah Brown Sings**

Mahalia Jackson (★★★★ Live Records) is Brown's debut solo album recorded live over two days with Prince's engineer Hans-Martin Buff as a part of an educational engineering programme at Abbey Road. Her band, helmed by Roxy Music pianist Colin Good and completed by organist Luke Smith, drummer Jerome Brown and Tom Wheatley on upright bass, is both intuitive and precise and the 10 remakes – Nobody Knows, On My Way, Walk Over God's Heaven, Didn't It Rain, etc – are spirited and provide a balm for the soul.

76-year-old **JOHNNY RAY DANIELS** hails from eastern North Carolina and performs gospel music steeped in blues feeling. His father was a musician and he learned playing guitar from watching him before he debuted in rock'n'rollers the Soul Twisters. His wife is Alice Vines, singer with the Glorifying Vines Sisters – Daniels provides guitar and piano for them. His son, meanwhile is Anthony 'Amp' Daniels who leads Dedicated Men of Zion. Amp Daniels sings backing vocals on his father's long-time coming debut album **Whatever You Need** (★★★★ Bible & Tire

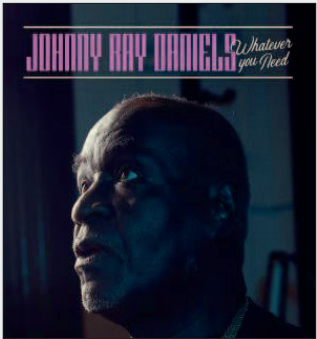
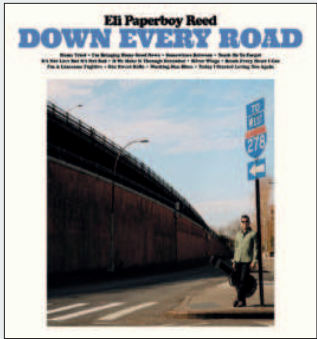
Recording Co). Produced by Bruce Watson, it's a real humdinger, full of get-you-on-your-feet-and-dancing-in-the-aisles sacred soul from the joyous call and response of the title track to the soulful testifying of Church Get Ready aka Amen.

ELI 'PAPERBOY' REED arrived back in 2005 with the bluesy R&B of *Sings "Walkin' And Talkin' For My Baby" And Other Smash Hits!*. Since then he's made soulful pop (2010's *Come And Get It*) lo-fi gospel (2016's *My Way Home*) and sophisticated soul (99 *Cent Dreams*). With fifth album **Down Every Road** (★★★★ **Yep Roc**) he rewrites the Merle Haggard songbook – *Mama Said, I'm Bringing Home Good News, I'm Gonna Break Every Heart I Can et al* – as Stax soul with Reed shouting, screaming and down on his knees and pleading. Recorded with musical partner Vince Chiarito (Black Pumas, Charles Bradley) and tracked live to tape at Brooklyn's Hive Mind Recording with his longtime band of Mike Montgomery (bass) and Noah Rubin (drums), it's exhilarating stuff.

THE TRAMMPS' Burn Baby Burn: Disco Inferno – The Trammps Albums 1975-1980 (★★★★ **SoulMusic Records**) is just that, their eight albums *The Trammps*, *The Legendary Zing Album*, *Where The Happy People Go*, *Disco Inferno, III*, *The Whole World's Dancing, Mixin' It Up* and *Slipping Out* over eight CDs. Re-pressed this month is **EDWIN STARR's Soul Master** (★★★★ **Cherry Red**), the Nashville, Tennessee singer's exceptional 1968 debut. Its tracklisting reads like a greatest hits, including *Agent Double-O Soul*, *Stop Her On Sight*

(S-O-S) and *Headline News*. Starr's *There You Go* from 1973 also provides one of the many standouts on the various artist compilation **Wants List 5** (★★★★ **Soul Brother**) which celebrates 30 years of Soul Brother Records with a selection of two step and modern soul club classics bookended by Barry White's tremendous seven-minute long *Playing Your Game Baby* from '77 and *Hang On In There Baby* by Mike James Kirkland from '72 and also including the Four Tops, Thelma Houston and Marlena Shaw.

Ex-Motown staffer Mickey Stevenson worked church singers Pat Hodges, Denita James and Jessica Smith hard. Daily rehearsal sessions running from one to three hours and a gruelling live schedule to match honed their vocal wall of sound – a combination of powerful gospel leads, often by Hodges, and sweet but tough harmonising – to perfection. Lessons in etiquette, meanwhile, produced a trio capable of seducing the prestigious Copa crowd. **HODGES, JAMES, SMITH (& CRAWFORD)'s Early Years And Unheard Pearls 1970-1973** (★★★★ **Kent**) is re-promoted this month and collects the Los Angeles/Detroit vocal outfit's 70s soul recordings. When Carolyn Crawford joined for 1971's *Nobody* and 1972's *Let's Pick Up The Pieces* – real jewel-in-the-crown girl group soul pieces – they should have soared. Maybe their unwieldy moniker put people off, but their unissued material collected here is also impressive; in particular the effusive *Wishful Thinking* and empowerment anthem-in-the-making *Nothing Special In You Boy*.



The Adverts

Cast Of Thousands

★★★★★
FIREFLP 144 RSD (LP)
British punks' not-so-difficult follow-up



Second albums are notoriously problematic and The Adverts seemed to go out of their way to make theirs more difficult than most. Fans were expecting something along the lines of 1978 debut album *Crossing The Red Sea With...*, but in 1979 they delivered *Cast Of Thousands*, which toned down the walls of guitars and used awkward, scratchy guitars instead, plus pianos, choirs and keyboards. These elements combined for a still-powerful album, that was also imaginative and beautiful, providing a perfect setting for TV Smith's highly accomplished lyrics. This white vinyl reissue contains the album, the Television's Over single, sleeve-notes by TV Smith and Henry Rollins,

and all four of The Adverts' excellent John Peel Sessions, recorded between April 1977 and November 1979. *Shane Baldwin*

Aerosmith

1971: The Road Starts Hear

★★★★
UMe 4506234 (CD, (LP)

Rough gems in the rehearsal room



Long before the sappy ballads and the headline-grabbing Toxic Twins shenanigans, Aerosmith started out as a good ol' fashioned bluesy rock'n'roll band with bucketloads of swagger and shades of greatness. Originally an RSD release, *The Road Starts Hear* captures them live in rehearsals some two years before their self-titled debut appeared in the shops. Among the material being honed for that debut album – *Dream On*, *Walkin' The Dog*, *Mama Kin* – *The Road Starts*

Hear also features Reefer Head Woman (later rehashed for *Night In The Ruts*) and Major Barbara, a song which lay in the vaults for years. Quality-wise it's rough, but it certainly hints at the grandeur that was to follow. *John Tucker*

África Negra

Antologia Vol. 1

★★★★★
Bongo Joe BJR 56 (CD, 2LP)

São Tomé legend's gloriously uplifting music collected



Formed in the early 70s, África Negra earned their spurs playing at street dances in their native São Tomé. Combining local Puxa rhythms with a glut of pan-African styles their influence soon spread beyond the archipelago to the African mainland. Compiled from key releases – most of it issued in the 80s and early 90s – this anthology forms a shimmering career overview. Much of their

music was recorded outdoors in a courtyard in front of their fans – their cramped studio unable to fit the 12-member line-up – and there's a palpable sense of the group replicating the energy of those early street dances. Among the highlights, Vence Vitória's upbeat melding of shuffled rhythms, jangly guitars and rhumba basslines come topped with a gloriously charismatic performance from lead singer João Seria. Sazozinha winningly melds Ghanaian highlife trumpets into their trademark sound while 12 De Julio is a joyous ode to São Tomé's independence. *Paul Bowler*

Terry Allen & The Panhandle Mystery Band

Smokin The Dummy

★★★★
Paradise of Bachelors PoB 065 (CD, LP)

Bloodlines

★★★★★
Paradise of Bachelors PoB 066 (CD, LP)
Tragi-comic country capers from Texan hero



Following the twisted mastery of 1979's acclaimed double album *Lubbock (On Everything)* was never going to be easy, but these welcome reissues proved maverick Texan songwriter Terry Allen still had plenty left in the tank. The two records were separated by three years, arriving in 1980 (*Smokin The Dummy*) and '83 (*Bloodlines*). The latter is the marginally better of the pair, its religious fixations and oddball amalgams of country, folk, jazz and gospel winning out over *Smokin the Dummy's* penchant for funk-riding Southern rock riffage. But both albums are stuffed with waggishly eclectic gems, all alive with their author's rebel-eye view and populated by the kinds of hard-luck heroes found in one of Harry Crews' brutally funny yarns. Eccentric, emotional, poetic and acerbic, this is Allen sowing the seeds for alt-country's unruly crop. *Spencer Grady*

John Barry

The More Things Change – Film, TV & Studio Work 1968 – 1973

★★★★★

Ace CDTOP 16 (CD)

Yorkshire's finest, during arguably his creative peak



A magnificent collection of early Moog adopter John Barry's

definitely bittersweet compositions as the 60s swung into the 70s, this gathers the 1970 album *Ready When You Are, J.B.* plus an aesthetically pleasing assortment of further jewels. It's not quite a Best Of, and doesn't mean to be, offering tangents and sideroads of considerable intrigue. So while the charm of *Midnight Cowboy* and *We Have All The Time In The World* draw us in, there are trips through the buoyant but sinister *Fun City*, the melancholy *Afternoon* and the blend of jouissance and sorrow that is *Theme From The Persuaders*. Theme From Walkabout (never properly released until six years ago) is like hearing perfection if that involved nuance. *Chris Roberts*

Pierre Boulez

Composer, Conductor, Enigma

★★★★★

Cherry Red ACME 362 CDX (4CD)

Early recordings from modernism titan



The post-war avant-garde certainly took itself seriously, and

Pierre Boulez, an advocate of serialism who studied under Olivier Messiaen, was one of its most towering figures. The humourlessness was understandable – modernism sought to eradicate the horrors of two world wars by dispensing with form and reinventing everything in a kind of cultural purge. Listening to movements such as *Pli Selon Pli*, erratic and operatic, is a strangely fascinating experience though it feels more like a history lesson than something you might put on for pleasure. This anthology is a glimpse into the uncompromising work of a conductor, music theorist and composer whose ultramodernism now sounds rather quaint. That said, Boulez's interpretations of Stravinsky and Varèse are well worth the admission fee alone. *Jeremy Allen*

Rita Coolidge

Anytime...Anywhere/ Love Me Again / Satisfied / Heartbreak Radio

★★★★★

BGO BG0CD 1476 (2CD)

Four smooth solo records



Goldfrapp: step into Alison's world on their mesmeric debut



After five modestly selling albums, Coolidge struck out for fame

in 1977 with a string of four smash singles. That year's *Anytime...Anywhere* was the big album, a transatlantic Top 10 entry containing UK hit *We're All Alone* and US No 2 *Higher And Higher*. The velvet-voiced Coolidge lacked the pizzazz of fellow interpretative singer Linda Ronstadt, impressing most on ballads. She leant on brother-in-law Booker T Jones, of MGS fame, as keyboardist/musical director for all but the last title, on which former Ronstadt sidekick Andrew Gold presided. Too sweet to consume in one sitting, these four albums will find a MOR market – especially as *Satisfied* and *Heartbreak Radio* are making belated UK CD debuts. *Michael Heatley*

Bill Evans Trio

The Legendary Bill Evans Trio

★★★★★

Cherry Red ACME 361 CDT (3CD)

The almost complete works of defining jazz ensemble



By the time Bill Evans made overtures to form a trio in 1959, he'd

already accompanied greats like George Russell and Charles Mingus and could be heard delicately striking arguably the most famous chords in all of jazz on Miles Davis' *So What*. The trio with contrabassist Scott LaFaro and drummer Paul Motian was as legendary as it was short-lived – LaFaro was tragically killed in a car accident in July '61. Evans was one of the most preternaturally agile yet tasteful pianists to ever draw breath, and the balance between all three players is remarkable throughout these five recordings, gathered together over three CDs, from schmaltzy standards made heavenly manna on the classic *Portrait In Jazz* to the 1960 *Birdland Sessions*. *Jeremy Allen*

Family

A Song For Me

★★★★★

Eclectic ECLEC 22790 (2CD)

Prog clan's third, with plenty of extras

This 1970 album was the eclectic combo's third and one that propelled them into a new



world with violin-playing bassist John Weider and multi-instrumentalist Poli Palmer.

The latter brings the curious mix of sawing violin and the delicate echo of vibes to the eye-opening music created by Roger Chapman's extraordinary vocals and Charlie Whitney's guitar, even banjo. Wilder than earlier work, it became their biggest seller, reaching No 4. Remastered here, it sits alongside two singles including *No Mule's Fool*, first of a handful of hits. A second CD has nine radio tracks: a *Top Gear* session (featuring sax player Jim King from the earlier line-up) and a *John Peel Sunday Concert*. The 28-page booklet tells the album story in words and photos. *Nick Dalton*

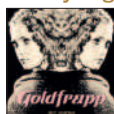
Goldfrapp

Felt Mountain

★★★★★

BMG 4050538664355 (CD, LP)

Ageless debut still shines so very brightly



In 2000, Goldfrapp's debut album seemed to inhabit its own time and place. No signs of age diminish this reissue, featuring no extras but bolstered by photography and liner notes by music writer Lior Phillips. Former Orbital collaborator Alison Goldfrapp and composer Will Gregory forged vivid electro-organic dreamscapes, suspended in the liminal spaces between soundtracks and small-hours fantasies, innocence and experience, desire and death, abstraction and melodic immediacy. While Goldfrapp's comedown-Piaf vocals share opaque psycho-sensual intimations, Gregory's arrangements (with guests including Portishead's Adrian Utley) of samples, strings, Moogs and spy-movie harpsichords ripple with crystalline detail. If the stylisations sometimes threaten to stifle the emotions, Pilots compensates beautifully, its off-world meditation on love and temporality channelling *Blade Runner*'s glinting influence. Two decades after its dinner-party infamy, *Felt Mountain* still seems to have seen things you people wouldn't believe. *Kevin Harley*

NOW ON



ARGENT

HOLD YOUR HEAD UP
THE BEST OF ARGENT



2 CD SET

Argent was formed in 1969 by Rod Argent and Chris White, who had been the keyboard player and the bassist, and principal songwriters, in 60s **hitmakers The Zombies**. Chris White now assumed a writing and producing role, so **Jim Rodford** (Argent's cousin and formerly with the Mike Cotton Sound) was recruited on bass. The line-up was completed by **drummer Bob Henrit** and **guitarist/vocalist/songwriter Russ Ballard** (both previously with **The Roulettes** and **Unit 4 + 2**).

Written by Argent and White, the single "**Hold Your Head Up**" reached number 5 in both the UK and the US, where it sold over a million copies. The band followed up with "**Tragedy**" and then the massive rock anthem "**God Gave Rock & Roll To You**", another worldwide hit, written by Russ Ballard. The song gained a new lease of life in 1991 when Kiss's cover version was featured at the end of the film "**Bill And Ted's Bogus Journey**".

"It's Only Money (Pt 2)" was another hit.

This 28 track 2 CD compilation gathers all the hits and the cream of the album tracks. The booklet includes annotation by Alan Robinson.

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From The Vaults

Grateful Dead

Dick's Picks, Vol 19:
Fairgrounds Arena
Oklahoma City, OK
10/19/73

★★★★★
Real Gone RLGM 13231 PMI (6LP)
Vintage Dead, now on vinyl

 First released on Grateful Dead Records as a 3CD set in 2000, Real Gone's hulking 6LP reissue of the Dead's first post-Wake Of The Flood show has been mastered for vinyl from the original tapes by the set's original mastering engineer, Jeffrey Norman. The show finds the Dead in often dazzling form and seizing the opportunity to fold half of their latest album into their set. Of those "new" songs highlights include a sauntering Mississippi Half-Step Uptown Toodleo and the sweetly soulful Eyes Of The World, which provides a jumping-off point for an exhilarating series of musical diversions. When it comes to the tried and tested material, a magnificently free Dark Star finds its way to a blissed-out Morning Dew by way of the appropriately-titled Mind Left Body Jam. Essential listening for Deadheads.
Jamie Atkins

Jamie T

Panic Prevention

★★★★★
Virgin 4519372 (2CD)
Caning it, croissants and c*s doing wheelies**

 Fifteen years after sundry comparisons to various glottal-stop Brit-rap

frontliners, Wimbledon motormouth Jamie Treays' debut holds its unvarnished own as an arresting one-off. Lurching between songs like a night-bus casualty, or curled up in a corner in comedown-lashed self-hatred, Treays marshals a deceptively damaged mix of skiffle-billy, hip-hop, folk and dub-punk in the service of lager-lubricated vignettes. Populated with vivid character sketches, the results are so evocative you can almost smell the Stella and "crack-pipe reek". As Treays recently confessed on Twitter, some lyrics have aged awkwardly. But his wit, bravado and intelligence make for bracing returns between the breakneck pulse of Salvador and the indelible chorus of Sheila, while a tender crack of vulnerability makes itself felt gloriously on standout cut Calm Down Dearest.
Kevin Harley

Howard Jones

The 12" Album + The 12"ers Vol. 2

★★★★★
Cherry Red CRR2918523 2 (2CD)
Gold-selling mix and obscure sequel packaged together in one set


 Although Howard Jones' name isn't necessarily associated with the 80s' early remix culture era, 1984's *The 12" Album* sold 100,000 copies. Mixed by Jones' regular co-producer Stephen W Taylor, the extended versions of songs from debut album *Human's Lib* weren't as inventive as what Jellybean

and Shep Pettibone were doing to pop 12"s, but they maintained Jones' irrepressible enthusiasm, with Total Conditioning highlighting his pre-fame prog roots. Strangely, a second volume based on follow-up album *Dream Into Action* was only released in Japan. It's equally efficient, with the Extended Mix of Things Can Only Get Better a deliciously fun time capsule of the era's grooves.
John Earls

Nils Lofgren

Night After Night

★★★★★
BGO BG0CD 1473 (2CD)
Live double from Neil/Bruce sidekick

 Compiled from three 1977 shows, *Night After Night* now makes its UK CD debut. At the time of release it was compared unfavourably with a 'live bootleg' issued by A&M a couple of years earlier. And while it's true the punky attitude of *Back It Up* is missing, there's a broader spectrum of material here that is welcome. Small points: Goin' Back was written by Goffin and King, not Lofgren, while the cut-in crowd noise between vinyl sides could and should have been edited out. Wornell Jones' bass varies wildly in prominence, but this may well have been the case 45 (gulp) years ago. Kudos, nevertheless, to BGO for finally bringing this into the digital domain: completists will rejoice.
Michael Heatley

Branko Mataja

Over Fields And Mountains

★★★★★
Numero Group NUM 082 (LP)
What's he building in there?

 Raised in Bakar, Croatia, Branko Mataja was displaced by WWII and arrived in Los Angeles in the mid-60s by way of a German labour camp, Yorkshire and Canada. In LA, Mataja began fixing and making guitars in his home workshop, where he began experimenting with recording. In 1973, Mataja released an album, *Traditional And Folk Songs Of Yugoslavia*, which was released on Essar Records, a local label ran by a friend, Steffano Riggio. He followed it up with the self-released *Folk Songs Of Serbia* in the mid-80s. *Over Fields And Mountains* compiles remastered songs from those two sought-after LPs. Mataja takes traditional Balkan music and reimagines



Grateful Dead: they had very specific dressing room requirements

it for electric guitar, using experimental home recording techniques to create elegant, haunting, very moving and otherworldly music. These weird songs of longing feel oddly contemporary and somehow unlike anything else you're likely to hear this year.
Jamie Atkins

Billy Mackenzie

Satellite Life: Recordings 1994-1996


★★★★★
Cherry Red CDTRED 856 (CD)
Associates singer's solo work

 On the sleeve-notes to this three-disc treasure trove, co-writer Steve Augle recalls Billy Mackenzie riling producers with unreasonable demands. "Could you make that synth sound like an Egyptian pyramid?" was one. Twenty-five years after the Associates singer's suicide, *Satellite Life* offers sumptuous evidence of that extravagance across 39 released/unreleased cuts and covers, ranged from ecstatic to experimental. From posthumous album *Beyond The Sun*, the icily ornate Winter Academy and feathery And This She Knows attest to Mackenzie's devastating way with ballads. One or two rarities run to flab, but the Bobbie Gentry-ish Tallahatchie Pass, Giorgio Moroder-esque Put This Right, acid-house banger Diamanda and Bowie-ish McArthur's Son offer lush glimpses of an outré talent untethered: whether he got that pyramid sound or not, Mackenzie clearly had so much left to give.
Kevin Harley

Madness

Keep Moving

★★★★★
Union Square Music SALVOLP 11 (LP)
Vinyl reissue for their "serious" fifth album

 *Keep Moving*, released in February 1984, was Madness' final LP for Stiff Records and their last to feature keyboardist and principal songwriter Mike Barson until 1999's *Wonderful*. There'd always been a vein of melancholy within Madness' catalogue but now the former "Nuttie Boys" wanted to be taken seriously. The beautiful, poignant One Better Day was inspired by Camden homeless hostel, Arlington House, Time For Tea tells the horrific story of a boy who locked himself in a fridge on wasteland while playing hide and seek and Give Me A Reason is about mental and physical abuse. Even hit single Michael Caine was in part inspired by The Troubles in Northern Ireland as well as *The Ipcress File*. Several songs have a 60s soul influence including the title track featuring Stax style blowing from The TKO Horns.
Jon Harrington

Pat Matshikiza and Kippie Moeketsi

Tshona!

★★★★★
We Are Busy Bodies WABB 113 (LP)
Classic South African jazz album revived

 The alto saxophonist Kippie Moeketsi rose to fame during the tail end of the 50s as a member of the Jazz Epistles alongside Hugh Masekela and Abdullah Ibrahim, who became better known outside of their native South Africa by relocating to the USA. In 1975, Moeketsi joined forces with the pianist Pat Matshikiza for this delightful four-track album, which came out originally on the As Shams label. Fronting a cohesive and simpatico quintet that included tenor hornblower Basil "Mannenbergh" Coetzee, *Tshona!* provides a vivid snapshot of mid 70s South



Howard Jones: a new set celebrates his heyday

Heavy Soul

How a widescreen symphony, born of despair, still resonates today. *By Charles Waring*

Marvin Gaye

What's Going On - 50th Anniversary Edition

★★★★★

Motown/UMG 3558417 (2LP)

After the tragic death of his beloved duet partner Tammi Terrell from a brain tumour at the age of 24 in March 1970, Marvin Gaye was a broken man. He withdrew from making music and fell into an abyss of depression that was exacerbated by marital problems, tax troubles and an escalating coke habit. Such was his despair that Gaye even tried to kill himself. But by June that year, something had changed; a glimmer of hope had returned and he was back in the studio, pouring his angst into a thematically linked song cycle that became his defining masterwork: *What's Going On*.

From a musical perspective, *What's Going On*, with its loose jazz-tinged grooves and outright rejection of Berry Gordy's assembly-line approach to music-making, was a landmark release in Motown's history. And much to the Detroit mogul's chagrin, it also dragged the label into the age of protest songs via Gaye's focus on the Vietnam War (*What's Going On*), poverty (*Save The Children*), urban unrest (*Inner City Blues*) and ecological issues (*Mercy Mercy Me*). Gordy saw the record as tantamount to commercial suicide yet, on its release in May 1971, he was shocked at how quickly it became the best-selling album that Motown had ever released.

Half-a-century on, *What's Going On*'s seamless blend of social commentary and soulful music continues to resonate with listeners and although a straight reissue would probably suffice, as it's the record's 50th birthday, it would seem a bit

Marvin Gaye: what's going on is that it is chucking it down and he's forgotten his brolly



churlish not to honour it with a special package. This is presumably why Kevin Gray, the audio boffin responsible for Blue Note's Tone Poet series, has been brought in to master the album from the original analogue tape. The record looks good, too, thanks to a sturdy tip-on gatefold cover and there are a clutch of bonus tracks, which include a previously unissued "stripped version" of the title song and some Salaam Remi remixes. There are also new liner notes, courtesy of the award-winning American poet and cultural commentator Hanif Abdurraqib, who offers an insightful analysis of the album together with Andrew Flory, who remembers the arranger David Van De Pitte, the man whose orchestral charts were crucial to the album's epic, widescreen sound.

But ultimately, none of this superfluous padding – as good as it is – matters as much as the original nine-track album, whose visceral power still shines through. Like George Orwell's 1984, Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* was not intended by its author as

a prescient glimpse of the future but rather was a critique of the times it was created in; a meditation on what was happening in the world during 1970 and '71. And yet like Orwell's novel, through the imperfections of humanity over the decades, it has become a cultural touchstone for everything that is wrong with the world.

"When I look at the world, it fills me with sorrow," sings Gaye on *Save The Children*, but if he was here today, he'd feel even more depressed. He'd see that not much has changed at all on planet earth; in fact, with climate change, various humanitarian crises across the globe, and the prospect of an internecine global conflict ignited by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, things have got far worse.

Though an artistic triumph for its creator, who produced one of the greatest albums of all time but would never again reach such Olympian heights, sadly, *What's Going On* remains a perpetual reminder of humanity's continuing failings.

African jazz. All four tracks are joyously life-affirming and their unrepentant sense of joie de vivre – expressed via infectious melodies and danceable rhythms – offered a clenched fist of defiance in the oppressively ugly face of apartheid. *Charles Waring*

Brian May

Another World

★★★★

EMI 3862303 (CD/2CD, LP, 2CD/LP)

A right royal repackaging, but no musical classic



Queen's guitarist's second solo effort from 1998 was, and remains, a mixed bag. The original covers concept explains songs by Mott, Hendrix, the Shadows etc, but the May-penned material that elbowed its way in is variable. Highlights of a 15-track bonus disc are two live cuts, *Hammer To Fall* and *On My Way Up*, recorded in Paris in 1998 and previously only available on the *Red Special* Japanese

EP. But the likes of a short spoken tribute to drummer Cozy Powell (whose last studio recording this was) and a cover of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*'s *Hot Patootie* will be consigned to the shelf after one play. The boxed two CD/blue vinyl combo with booklet and enamelled badge will, however, attract Queen completists. *Michael Heatley*

Almon Memela

Funky Africa

★★★★★

We Are Bodies WABB 116 (LP)

African funk rarity rides again



record that is currently going on Discogs for 400 quid, *Funky Africa* was a one-off solo LP by the South African composer/producer Memela. Hailing from KwaZulu-Natal province, he went on to lead several groups, including Almon's Jazz Eight in the 60s.

Much desired by crate-diggers, who will pay big money for a

This overlooked gem, which snuck out with little fanfare on its release by Atlantic Records in 1975, has proved the most enduring of Memela's recordings. Its desirability is mainly due to the infectious title track, a joyous instrumental reconfiguration of Donny Hathaway's 1970 soul hit *The Ghetto*, but there are other highpoints; like *Telephone* with its township rhythms, the Latin-tinged disco inflections of *Hi-Jack* (*Your Love*) and fluidly soulful groove called *Some Funky Things*. Funktastic. *Charles Waring*

Malcolm Middleton

A Brighter Beat

★★★★★

Full Time Hobby FTH 033 LPXV (LP)

Arab Strap man bounces back with hope, sort of



negative feelings "into something brighter that has

some use". The result was the Arab Strap axe-man's third solo album, which equips mordant meditations on depression with chivvying complements of sturdy-to-buoyant melody. We're All Going To Die is exemplary, dispatching mortal truths with barrelhouse vim; with Jenny Reeve duetting, *Fight Like The Night* counters the doldrums with an assertive melody wedded to razor-sharp guitars. Set to folk arpeggios and an ABBA-esque beat, the title-track brims with empathy, while *Somebody Loves You* evokes a Falkirk Elliott Smith in its warm veracity. He dubs himself a "budding failure" on *Superhero Songwriters*, but Middleton's blooming songcraft harbours durable reserves of determination and beauty here. *Kevin Harley*

Ennio Morricone

Sans Mobile Apparent OST

★★★★★

Wewantsounds WWSLP 54 (LP)

French score reissued

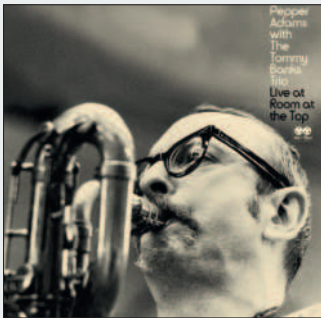


Ennio Morricone was right in the middle of his *giallo* (Italian thriller) period when he composed this soundtrack to director Philippe Labro's 1971 French crime film. Unlike many of those celebrated scores, his work on *Sans Mobile Apparent* remains little-known. Many of the maestro's classic tropes are in evidence, however; opener *Senza Motivo Apparente* features a catchy theme whistled by fellow composer Alessandro Alessandrini. *Sospensione Folle* delivers chills down the back with it's foreboding strings and rattlesnake sound effects. On *Il Moente*, the violins make thrilling stabs of sound while *Pieno Petto*'s discordant strings hark back to Morricone's early grounding in serialism. Striking new artwork by Eric Adrian Lee and an interview with Labro in the liner notes add further value to a fine reissue. *Paul Bowler*

JAZZ COLLECTOR

By Charles Waring

With its gruff, resonant sound, the baritone saxophone has never proved as popular with musicians as the more fashionable alto and tenor varieties of the instrument. Even so, the jazz world has produced several virtuoso masters of the baritone horn, ranging from Harry Carney, who played in Duke Ellington's band, to Gerry Mulligan, a leading light of California's cool school scene. Another formidable baritone specialist was Michigan-born **PEPPER ADAMS**, a hard bop disciple who was noted for his distinctive bark-like tone and athletic solos. A prolific sideman whose credits range from John Coltrane to Quincy Jones, Adams is mainly remembered for his work alongside the Detroit trumpeter Donald Byrd between 1959 and 1970 but a magnificent new archival release, *Live At Room At The Top* (★★★★★ **Reel To Real**), reveals that he was a formidable presence on stage who thrived under the spotlight. The double album (mastered for vinyl by the redoubtable Kevin Gray) captures Adams on stage at the University of Alberta in 1972 in tandem with the Tommy Banks Trio. Adams attacks the set's uptempo material with gusto but shows a blend of sensitivity and invention on the slower tracks.



Another stupendous live set comes from one of jazz's greatest trumpeters, **FREDDIE HUBBARD**, who can be heard playing at the peak of his powers on the tremendous *Music Is Here: Live At Orft 1973* (★★★★★ **We Want Sounds**), which captures the Indianapolis hornblower leading a quintet consisting of saxophonist Junior Cook, pianist George Cables, bassist Kent Brinkley and drummer Michael Carvin (who contributes quotes to the set's informative liner notes, describing the gig as catching "lightning in a bottle"). The four long tracks, whose standout is an epic extended version of First Light, are all taken from Hubbard's CTI repertoire.

Hubbard can also be heard in a live setting at a later juncture co-leading a quartet with pianist **MCCOY TYNER** on *Live At Fabrik* (★★★★★ **Jazzline**), a double album that captures the two jazz giants performing at an iconic Hamburg venue in 1986. There's only one track from Hubbard's CTI catalogue – it's a mind-blowing 25-minute iteration of Neo-Terra – and the rest of the set comprises several Tyner originals and jazz standards, all beautifully rendered.

The mighty **GIL EVANS ORCHESTRA** appeared at the same German venue the same year and their concert there is now available as a 2-CD/3-LP set also called *Live At Fabrik* (★★★★★ **Jazzline**). A genius arranger famed for his orchestral collaborations with Miles Davis in the 1950s, Evans was later inspired by the music of Jimi Hendrix; significantly, the Hamburg concert contains four incredible interpretations of the guitarist's tunes, including a super-heavy big band take on Voodoo Chile.

Moving on to new albums, it's a bumper month for releases by jazz pianists. The prolific **BRAD MEHLDAU**, who is renowned for torpedoing preconceptions about him with his perpetual musical shape-shifting, takes a detour into new musical territory with the cinematic *Jacob's Ladder* (★★★★★

Nonesuch), a religious-themed concept album that's inspired in part by prog rock and includes a revamp of Rush's Tom Sawyer.

The highly regarded **LYNNE ARRIALE TRIO** return with *The Lights Are Always On* (★★★★★ **Challenge**), a superlative opus whose 10 tracks were inspired by people who made a difference during the challenges wrought by the pandemic. Famed for her limpid right-hand piano filigrees, Milwaukee-born Arriale is joined by bassist Jasper Somsen and drummer EJ Strickland, who offer simpatico support throughout.

There's more of an epic, widescreen approach on the large sonic canvas that is *Crisálida* (★★★★★ **Mack Avenue**), consisting of two orchestrated suites with voices and percussion by the noted Panamanian pianist/composer **DANILO PEREZ** and his six-piece group **THE GLOBAL MESSENGERS**. It's an album that tells stories through tone poems focusing on 21st century issues; climate change, immigration and humanitarian crises.

Closer to home, the young Scottish piano wizard **FERGUS MCCREADIE** returns with his second album, the evocative *Forest Floor* (★★★★★ **Edition**), an enthralling musical journey inspired by the landscapes of his native land.

The Armenian keyboard maestro, **TIGRAN HAMAYSAN** renowned for interweaving his country's folk songs with jazz, has never made a straight ahead jazz album until now in the shape of *StandArt* (★★★★★ **Nonesuch**), mostly a collection of standards that he refashions to reflect his own musical sensibilities. The album includes cameos from tenor saxophonists Joshua Redman and Mark Turner as well as trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire.

A more Nordic approach to piano playing is exemplified by the **TORD GUSTAVSEN TRIO** on *Opening* (★★★★★ **ECM**), a collection of low-key evocative mood pieces defined by wintry tone colours that epitomises the ECM aesthetic.

A sense of calm and stasis also pervades another new piano trio album; this time by London-based **JOY ELLIS**, who sang on her previous two records but opts for an all-instrumental set on the *Peaceful Place* (★★★★★ **Oti-O Records**) which showcases her sublime piano skills.

More piano magic comes from the long-running **JOONA TOIVANEN TRIO**, who have been around since they were teenagers in the mid-90s. The group's many years together infuses their music with a sense of cohesion and empathetic understanding that is clearly evident on the excellent *Both Only* (★★★★★ **We Jazz**), an album radiating brooding atmospherics.

A couple of new releases on Blue Note illustrate the label's eclectic roster; **TROMBONE SHORTY**'s brand of rambunctious New Orleans jazz – seasoned with funk, hip-hop and R&B – is epitomised by *Lifted* (★★★★★ **Blue Note**), whose earthiness contrast with the cerebral post-bop ruminations from the Chilean saxophonist **MELISSA ALDANA**; her fifth long-player *12 Stars* (★★★★★ **Blue Note**) is a cliché-free collection of probing musical exploration that finds her fronting a quintet that includes pianist Sullivan Fortner.

The "First Lady of Fusion", the great Brazilian vocalist **FLORA PURIM** makes a stunning return at the age of 79 with *If You Will* (★★★★★ **Strut**), her first solo album since 2005. The title track is a lovely remake of a song she recorded with the late keyboardist George Duke 22 years ago; Purim also resurrects iconic 500 Miles High from her back catalogue as well as serving up new material with assistance from her daughter Diana and husband Airtio.

There's a palpable Brazilian vibe, too, to the new album by American chanteuse **MELODY GARDOT**, who collaborates with the pianist **PHILIPPE POWELL** (son of the legendary songwriter and guitarist Baden Powell) on a truly beautiful collection of songs called *Entre Eux Deux* (★★★★★ **Decca**).

Penguin Café A Matter Of Life... 2021

★★★★★ Erased Tapes ERATP 149 (CD, LP) New life for classy debut

The Penguin Café Orchestra, creation of classical guitarist and arranger Simon Jeffes, played elegantly off-the-wall music bringing together piano, violin and, often, ukulele and harmonium, for almost two decades. On his death, son Arthur took over, truncated the name and masterminded this, a debut of hypnotic beauty that itself is now celebrating with a 10th anniversary edition. The feel of Edwardian parlour music given an avant-garde touch remained and multi-instrumentalist Jeffes



the younger was joined by an array of musicians, including Suede founder Neil Codling and Gorillaz percussionist Cass Browne. Particularly moving is Harry Piers, a near-solo, five-minute piano tribute to Jeffes the elder – the version on this remastered album is a new recording, subtly richer and more reflective. *Nick Dalton*

Rumer B Sides & Rarities Vol.2 ★★★★★ Cooking Vinyl COOKLP 828 (CD, LP) Second helping of Pakistan-born singer's off-cuts

It's hard to resist Rumer. Her voice is as warm, velvety, caressing and inviting as melted chocolate;



and there's something about its gorgeous but slightly melancholy tone that's irresistible to those who gravitate towards the 70s troubadours that have been Rumer's main inspirations. Listening to this baker's dozen of odds and sods – comprising outtakes from her previous albums and unused material from other, miscellaneous, projects – is like immersing yourself in a warm, relaxing bath that will make your worldly cares fade away. Featuring two excellent unreleased tracks (the self-penned Rose and the autobiographical Old Fashioned Girl) as well as pitch-perfect interpretations of several classic Burt Bacharach songs, Rumer's leftovers prove more nourishing than

most people's main courses. Charles Waring

Rush Moving Pictures – 40th Anniversary ★★★★★ UMe/Mercury 3587659 (3CD, 5LP) Anniversary reissue for Canadian trio's eighth



The opening pairing of Tom Sawyer and Red Barchetta indicated from the off that 1981's *Moving Pictures* was going to be something special. Inventive and hugely accessible, it quickly became a fan favourite, equalling its predecessor *Permanent Waves* UK Top 3 placing and foreshadowing another change of direction for Messrs

Lee, Lifeson and Peart. This anniversary release comes in the now traditional multiplicity of formats, but as with previous spruce-ups from their back catalogue the 3CD or 5LP package (in which the original album is accompanied by a contemporary live set) pretty much covers all the bases. The previously unreleased 19-song show from Toronto incorporates the entire album aside from *Witch Hunt*, and makes an interesting companion to the *Exit...Stage Left* live outing of the same era. *John Tucker*

Bonnie Pointer Like A Picasso ★★★★★ Omnivore OV 492 (CD) R&B singer's final solo album gets a second go

Norma Tanega:
a singular folk talent

Into The Open

Folk singer-songwriter's remarkable work collected. *By Lois Wilson*

Norma Tanega

I'm The Sky: Studio and Demo Recordings, 1964–1971

★★★★★

Anthology Editions ARC 0841 (2CD, 2LP)

Norma Tanega is best known for her 1966 wry hit single *Walkin' My Cat Named Dog* – Norma had wanted a dog but lived in a small apartment that didn't allow them so got a cat instead and did indeed call it dog and walk it. It's a gorgeous song, equal parts folk-pop and soulful beat, with Norma's rich contralto-to-alto-and-back-again, playful as befits the subject matter and utterly engaging, as she accompanies herself on guitar and also plays harmonica.

While it may be her only hit – a No 22 in the US and UK – it's only a small part of her story as *I'm The Sky: Studio And Demo Recordings, 1964–1971* reveals. A thrilling snapshot of her too-short career, it cherry picks tracks from her two released albums, 1966's titular *Walkin' My Cat Named Dog* for Bob Crewe's New Voice label and 1971's *I Don't Think It Will Hurt If You Smile*, originally issued on RCA Victor. It's boosted with two tracks from her 1969 unissued LP *Snow Cycles*, recorded for Capitol and a slew of intimate and stirring demos recently found in Tanega's Claremont home, which are just her and her guitar.

Born in Vallejo, California in 1939, the folk singer-songwriter grew up in Long Beach. She learned classical piano from an early age and after high school studied fine arts at Claremont College where she also taught herself acoustic guitar and autoharp from Joan Baez records. In 1963, she moved to Greenwich Village and became a part of the coffee house scene and protested the Vietnam war. While singing at a summer camp in the Catskill Mountains, she was spotted by producer and arranger Herb Bernstein, who hooked her up with songwriter/



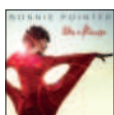
producer Bob Crewe (famed for his work with The Four Seasons). He signed her to his New Voice label in '65 and issued her expressive debut the following year – six of its 12 songs are on *I'm The Sky*... including the title track, the satirical *You're Dead* (which was used as the theme to the film and TV show *What We Do In The Shadows*) and the hypnotic *A Street That Rhymes At 6AM*, perhaps her finest song.

While promoting the album in the UK, Norma met Dusty Springfield on the set of TV show *Ready Steady Go!* The pair fell in love and Norma relocated to London to live with her. During their time together she wrote or co-wrote several songs for or with Dusty to sing.

Like Dusty, Norma was a singular talent and the 27 tracks here are testament to that, from those aforesaid tracks from her first album to *What More in This World Could Anyone Be Living For* (Version 2), one of five tracks from the Don Paul-produced, London-recorded *I Don't Think It Will Hurt If You Smile*, which adds atmospheric psychedelic flourishes with double-tracked

vocals and funky guitar reverberation. Then there's the magical melancholy of the shelved Capitol Sessions and the previously-unissued demo *Sunday Morning*, an incredibly beautiful meditation with finger picking.

In 1972, Tanega moved back to Claremont and sidelining music turned to visual arts and teaching ESL. Issued to coincide with *I'm The Sky*... is *Try To Tell A Fish About Water: The Art, Music And Third Life Of Norma Tanega*, which explores this later career through reproductions of her expressionistic paintings along with unseen photos, illustrations, journal entries and testimony from her friends and collaborators.



Bonnie Pointer's career might have had a different trajectory if

she'd stayed with The Pointer Sisters instead of leaving her siblings for a solo deal at Motown in 1978; after her departure, they signed to producer Richard Perry's Planet label and became a global sensation. Bonnie didn't enjoy the same level of success but made a comeback in 2011 with her fourth long-player, *Like A Picasso*, which is now remastered with bonus tracks. Written and produced by Lloyd Poe and Robin Taylor, it's a likeable country-rock-tinged affair packed with several strong storytelling ballads that play to Bonnie's musical strengths. Solid rather than stunningly spectacular, it's nevertheless a vivid reminder of the late singer's unique vocal talent.

Charles Waring

Slade

Slade Alive!

★★★★★

BMG BMGCAT 502 LP (LP)

Noddy & Co go crazy on iconic live set



You could say that 1972 was a little early in their career for Slade to release a live album. When *Slade Alive!* was recorded, between 19 and 21 October 1971, at the Command Theatre Studio, London, the band had only notched up one hit single, *Get Down Down And Get With It*. Live albums tend, on the whole, to serve as greatest hit collections, but in Slade's case, as their reputation as a formidable live act was already strong, they must have thought the time was right. Their live show needed to be captured. As this splendid splatter vinyl reissue shows, they were quite right. *Slade Alive!* shows Slade in all their raucous glory, a stomping,

euphoric beauty, topped off with Noddy's unique, throat-shredding vocals, and it deservedly soared to No 2 on the national chart.

Shane Baldwin

The Staples Jr. Singers

When Will We Get Paid

★★★★★

Luaka Bop LB 0099 CD (CD)

Lost gospel and soul gem rediscovered



To avoid confusion, this Mississippi-based gospel soul collective are not the Staples Singers, but the Brown siblings, who adopted the moniker in honour of their idols when they started out as teenagers (hence the Jr) in the early 70s. They made one LP before it – and the group – disappeared into obscurity. Recorded on a shoestring in 1975, it serves as a reminder that the best soul and gospel

doesn't need polish, finesse or hysteria to move the listener. Its raw stoicism is startling, the arrangements rarely deviating from guitar bass drum and vocal, but the performances particularly on *Somebody Save Me* and *Trouble Of The World* (with spectral Hammond) are spine-tingling, while the more upbeat *I'm Looking For A Man* (that'll be Jesus, naturally) is equally affecting.

Johnnie Johnstone

These Arms Are Snakes

Duct Tape & Shivering Crows

★★★★★

Suicide Squeeze SSQ 190 LPC 1 (CD, 2LP)

Odds and sods from post-hardcore eccentrics



Seattle's These Arms Are Snakes never achieved commercial success but were nonetheless

greatly revered. Indeed, in their seven years together – they went their separate ways in 2009 – the iconoclastic post-hardcore punks assume the status of 'your favourite band's favourite band', and their influence is still widespread today. This collection of non-album tracks, split EP and compilation songs shows why. Camera Shy's jaunty, quirky and aloof almost-hooks snarl pleasantly, but the song steadfastly refuses to become the anthem it could have been, while their cover of Heart-Shaped Box from *In Utero*, Nirvana's deliberately 'difficult' record, makes one of its most accessible songs much more discordant and inaccessible. Running in reverse-chronological order, *Duct Tape*... ends with the band's hitherto-unreleased first demo – a rampantly raw sign of the uncompromising genius that would later follow. *Mischa Pearlman*

PSYCH COLLECTOR

By JR Moores

THE PREACHERS were the kind of band who, back in the mid-60s, would surely have terrified conservative parents, and not just because of their unkempt barnets. Integral to LA's garage rock movement, the 45s compiled on *Stay Out Of My World* (★★★★Sundazed) sound so primal, they're verging on evil. You know, like the Stones (at their surliest), Iggy Pop, Link Wray, or Bo Diddley. Proper malevolence. Just Don't Complain is apocalyptically bleak. There are no lyrics to The Zeke, only howls. Chicken Papa is sublimely simple, and splendidly contagious. The ballads are less powerful, but there ain't many to skip through.

Recording in the early 70s, **THE HIGH KEYS** dealt in a sophisticated variety of stomp. *A Little Too Heavy* (★★★★Sundazed) showcases gnarly guitar tones, dominant organ



pressure, occasional harmonica, muddy drums, and Eagles-ish harmonies. The writing isn't too shabby either. Bird In The Hand almost reaches the heft of Vanilla Fudge. It's Alright lacks a whole lotta substance, though probably had impact as a frantic set-closer. Elsewhere, it's easy to imagine I'm On My Way Up being performed by the mighty Wings.

One of the selling points of the recent **FAUST** box set, 1971-1974, was its inclusion of the long-lost follow-up to *Faust IV*. For those who didn't splash out on that package, *Punkt* (★★★★Sundazed) is now available separately. Any fan of the krautrock pioneers who isn't thrilled on hearing this must be a few bratwurst short of a string. It draws on the group's previous explorations in jazzy skronk, sonic collage, post-hippie improv, and proto-industrial disorientation, while also pointing the way forward. At least it would've done, had Faust not vanished for several years thereafter.

HAWKWIND were not at their hippest in the decade documented on *Dreamworkers Of Time: The BBC Recordings 1985-1995* (★★★★Atomhenge). That says more about the era than the quality of the band. Judging by this 3CD set, their confidence hadn't been knocked. Catchy, hefty, almost worryingly tight, and climaxing with an appearance from ex-member Lemmy on an extended rendition of Silver Machine, Hawkwind's 1986 Reading Festival set sounds triumphant. 1988's Hammersmith Odeon concert is similarly rambunctious, and the final CD's radio sessions are the icing on the space cake.

Apparently if you lick the skin of the Bufo alvarius toad, it'll send you on quite the trip. Wikipedia says the creature's glands produce a psychotropic poison that's potent enough to kill a dog. If that risk sounds high (pun intended), then maybe settle for a record named in the amphibian's honour instead. Originally released in 1995, **BARDO POND**'s debut is a watermark moment in post-shoegaze distortion-delia. Setting the ball rolling for the Philadelphia alchemists' later essential releases, *Bufo Alvarius* (★★★★Fire) is heavier than Dumbo's hallucination and headier than the Lernaean Hydra.

The Pond are one of the few ensembles whose hazy rehearsal jams are worth owning. See their long-running, numerically titled *Volume* series, for instance. Also pleasing are those of **KANDODO**, heard preparing for their appearance at the 2015 Roadburn Festival on *Kandodo4: Burning The (Kandl)* (★★★Cardinal Fuzz). For this shindig, they were joined by Robert Hampson of Loop, whose rhythm section includes members of Kandodo. (Now who feels stuck in a loop?) The second half of this double-album houses the Roadburn set itself. As such, it feels a little repetitive if experiencing the whole caboodle in one sitting. Enjoyed apart, the gradually unfurling, atmospheric instrumentals are so well-stewed you can almost taste the dry ice.

Late last year, **GNOD** made an overdue return to our stereos with *La Mort Du Sens*. Looks like they've re-greased the wheels of their erstwhile prolificacy, as they're back already with *Hexen Valley* (★★★★

Rocket). The highlight is its second track Spotlight, which is about 15 minutes long and hinges on one of the deepest, nastiest, most authoritatively repetitive basslines since Blindness by The Fall. Poppier isn't the right word but if you fancy something shorter then Skies Are Red feels like early Sonic Youth or Swans are considering (but ultimately refusing) to cover the Beastie Boys' Sabotage. Befitting its title, Antidepressants is somewhat calmer (initially, at least) and even features some piano prods. About half way through it, GNOD kick off again and it's back to swirly-whirly, spacy-bassy, evil-weasel business. Waves Of Fear, meanwhile, could almost be described as a ballad, albeit one that's spent time lurking in *Twin Peaks*' Black Lodge and returned more than a little skewwhiff.

On their Bandcamp page, **REIGNS'** output is described as "sea-sick electro-hauntings from Wessex". Too electronic for a position in the coveted Psych Collector column? To reiterate, psych is not the instruments one uses or the genre in which one dabbles. It's a state of mind, dude. Besides, if we circle back to Hawkwind, electronics were a crucial aspect in the evolution of space rock. There are different kinds of space, of course. Some sort of concept album about a hermitic hoarder, which may or may not reflect the actual lives of the brothers Tim and Roo Farthing who recorded it, *Tollinghurst* (★★★★Wrong Speed) is a very filmic or perhaps literary record which demands full attention and repeat listens. On that basis, Hawkwind would surely grant their approval and perhaps even offer to help tidy the shed.

Richard Thompson (guitar, vocal): A Collection Of Rare & Unreleased Material (1969-1976) – Super Deluxe Edition

★★★★★
Universal 3676259 (2LP)

Folk troubadour's buried treasure

Originally released in 1976, this double compendium plugged the gap created by Thompson's imminent hiatus. A career retrospective with a twist, the first LP comprised unreleased session cuts, as well as the opener from Fairport's debut album – hardly 'rare', but vital in helping trace his artistic development from disciple of the SF Sound to the most original guitarist of his generation. Highlights include a version of Ballad Of Easy Rider (it didn't fit the Celtic mould of *Liege & Lief*) and two performances (Dark End Of The Street, A Heart Needs A Home) demonstrating that Linda's honeyed larynx was often a match for Sandy's. The second LP contained

two extended workouts from a performance at Oxford Polytechnic, a smouldering take of Night Comes In and a scintillating Calvary Cross. *Johnnie Johnstone*

Toyah
Toyah! Toyah! Toyah!

★★★★★
Cherry Red CDBRED 841
(CD/DVD, LP)

Punk-popper, live in 1980

Birmingham actress Toyah Wilcox confused some by pursuing a parallel career in music and operating somewhere between punk and pop. She gained some punk credibility by appearing in Derek Jarman's 1978 film *Jubilee*, alongside Adam Ant, Wayne County, The Slits and Siouxsie And The Banshees. She released live album *Toyah! Toyah! Toyah!* in 1980. Recorded at Club Lafayette, Wolverhampton, on 17 June that year, it rose to No 22 on the national album chart. Now reissued on LP and CD, the CD version includes a DVD of the 1980 ATV documentary *Toyah*, the first time it's been released



on disc, plus three previously unreleased tracks. It's a rousing if slick performance, with Toyah's yelping, lisping delivery to the fore, with the strident, keyboard-swathed epic leya a standout. *Shane Baldwin*

UK Subs
Work In Progress

★★★★★
Captain Oi! AHOYD 10310 (2LP)

Indestructible punks reach 'W'



The Subs decided to release an album for every letter in the alphabet, and 2010 found them at 'W', hence *Work In Progress*. This beautifully packaged reissue presents the album on two 10" vinyl discs, one gold, one silver, and is the first time the album has been available on vinyl since its original release. The sleeve has the lyrics to all 14 songs, including Charlie Harper's co-write with Rancid's Lars Frederiksen, the stuttering and spitting This Chaos. It was one of the band's strongest later

albums, right from ferocious opener Creation. Elsewhere, The Axe has hints of The Clash, and Robot Age is dense, moody and menacing. *Shane Baldwin*

Xentrix
Shattered Existence

★★★★★
Cherry Red/Dissonance QDISS 0203
CDD (CD)

Brit thrash hopeful's debut reissued with liner notes



Oft-derided as a weak imitation of their US peers, Preston thrash metal band Xentrix always struggled to be taken seriously. A novelty cover of Ray Parker Jr's Ghostbusters hardly bolstered their reputation as trailblazers to keep a watchful eye on. And yet there was much to recommend them as evidenced by this 1989 debut album. Opener No Compromise showed their mastery of Anthrax-style speed metal; the chugging riffs and lead singer Chris Astley's barked vocals on Balance Of Power was a decent stab at harnessing Metallica's core stylings.

The blistering Reasons For Destruction, meanwhile showed their capability of mining heavier territory. Reissued here it makes for a decent time capsule for fans of late 80s thrash, though the aforementioned Ghostbusters cover and its attendant EP – tacked on as an extra – are best avoided. *Paul Bowler*

Frank Zappa & The Mothers Of Invention
The Mothers 1971

★★★★★
Zappa Records ZR 20038 (8CD)

Flo & Eddie-period Mothers motherlode



The Mothers 1971 features the four-show run that closed NYC's Fillmore East on 5-6 June 1971, including the full John Lennon and Yoko Ono encore (Lennon on throat-shredding form on Well); the full London Rainbow Theatre show that brought a curtain down on this era of The Mothers; bonus live tracks from June 1971 shows; the Tears Began To Fall/Junier Mintz Boogie single; and radio spots. The shows represent a riot of imagination, wit and

virtuosity (not to mention FIVE Billy The Mountains). The cartoonish, acquired-taste humour of this period is offset by wild and muscular heaviness (check the Chunga's Revenge from Disc Four or Willie The Pimp from the final Fillmore show). A macabre sidenote – the Rainbow show ends with the sound of Frank Zappa being flung from the stage by an intruder after a reggae-tinged cover of I Want To Hold Your Hand, an assault that resulted in life-changing injuries. You'll only want to hear that once. Also out, *Live At The Fillmore East, June 1971* – a 3LP expanded edition of the original album with bonus material culled from *The Mothers 1971*, except for the vinyl-only King Kong Solos – and the *Rainbow Theatre* set on 3LP. *Jamie Atkins*

Zero 7 Yeah Ghost

★★★★

New State Entertainment NEW 9275
LP (2LP)

Uptempo downtempo on duo's fourth



By the time Zero 7 – Henry Binns and Sam Hardaker – released their

fourth album, *Yeah Ghost* in 2009, chill-out had run its course. What had been ground-breaking for the duo a decade before had now become so absorbed into the mainstream, it seemed every bar, shop and waiting room had downtempo being piped out. Aware of this, the duo's last album to date suggested they, too, were tired of being in the background at everyone's dinner party. Mr McGee and Medicine Man

are clattering jive-shuffles redolent of Girls Aloud (a good thing, *RC* hastens to add). Everything Up (Zizou), a tribute to Zinedine Zidane sung by Binns, owes a debt to Talking Heads; Sleeper is propulsive glam-electro. It's only on Pop Art Blue do we get back on brand: a wistful drifting piece with the crystalline vocals of Martha Tilston. *Daryl Easlea*

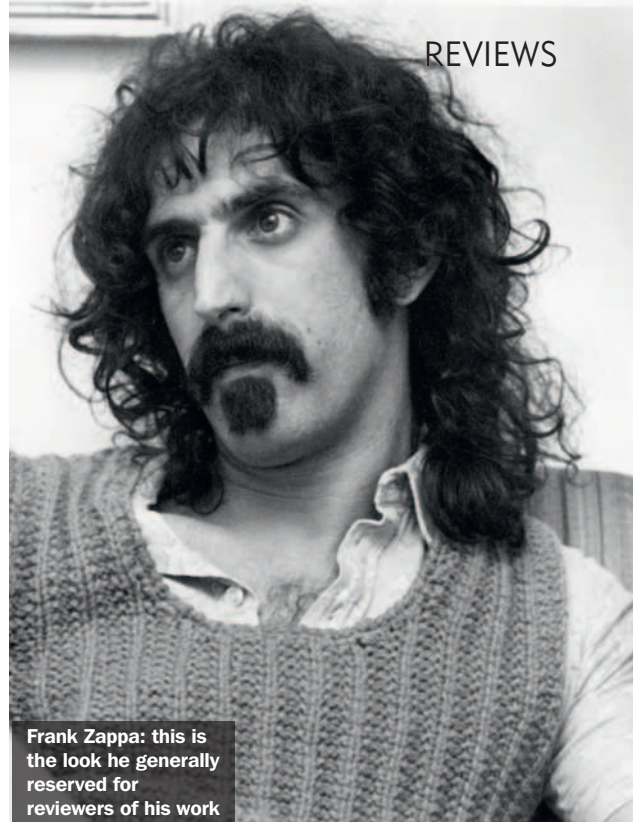
VARIOUS ARTISTS

Bored Teenagers Vol. 13: 16 Great British Punk Originals '77 – '82

★★★★

Bin Liner RUBBISHCD 021 (CD, LP)

More punk super-rarities from Dizzy's bin
Dizzy Detour's admirable quest



Frank Zappa: this is the look he generally reserved for reviewers of his work

PLEASE RELEASE ME

Our regular look at albums crying out for reissue

Colin Towns

Full Circle OST
Virgin V2093

These days multi-instrumentalist Colin Towns is renowned as a prolific film, television and theatre composer and the founder of The Mask Orchestra, but in 1978 he was better known as the keyboard player in the Ian Gillan Band. This was the year Gillan ditched the jazzy, arty stuff and went back to playing hard rock, a change in which Towns' role was pivotal; it was also the year Towns released the soundtrack LP to the supernatural horror film *Full Circle*. Starring Mia Farrow as Julia Lofting, *Full Circle* opened in London in May 1978 but wasn't exactly a major box office smash, so you can be forgiven for scratching your head. Three years later it was released in the States as *The Haunting Of Julia*, but again it failed to find favour. The soundtrack, however, is an object of rare beauty. Recorded at Gillan's Kingsway studios, *Full Circle* is a solo work composed and executed solely by Towns, with the exception of some addition percussion credited to bandmate Mark Nauseef.

The album is dominated by the haunting yet sublime refrain of Full Circle (Main Theme) which both opens and closes the album. Starting as a simple piano piece, this refrain is gradually layered with synths until it takes flight, building in intensity. Birdsong links the opening cut to Park, a mesmerising yet powerful interlude, which in turn gives way to echoing footsteps and Have You Got A Magnificent Problem? (Inside The Mental Home), a short piece on which – for the first half at least – Towns pounds on the keyboard, hinting at some degree of malevolence to come. Pretty Men Are Very Receptive (The Séance) continues this air of menace and it's at this point that you realise just what a gifted composer Towns is, using simple melodies to develop a deep feeling of unease. As a touch of relief, the side then plays out with Kate, a piece which is more upbeat and considerably less disturbing.



Side Two opens with the only vocal piece, Olivia. It would be unfair to suggest that, as a singer, Towns is a great pianist, yet although he acquits himself reasonably as a vocalist this is the album's weakest cut with a basic delivery and an avalanche of backing vocals. A known singer would have done more to have lifted it above the ordinary, and the instrumental passage which rounds the song off is much more interesting. Love Scene reprises the album's main melody, this time on flute with a piano backing coming in at the midway point and then finally a synth joining the refrain. It's a lilting calm before the storm, as although the ominous low note and keyboard flurries that introduce 'Magnus' – The Unwelcome Intrusion do warn of things to come; the unexpected crescendo of tubular bells is still quite an unsettling bombshell. An intense and seemingly triumphant return to the main theme, this time subtitled Everything's Right Now (and opening with a number of piano flourishes that Gillan fans might recognise from Towns' later solo spots onstage) takes the record to its fade.

A snippet from the album was used as part of Ian Gillan Band's intro tape, but regrettably *Full Circle* itself has been unfairly and unreasonably consigned to the vinyl wasteland of history – a great shame for such a wonderful body of work. *John Tucker*



to seek out impossibly rare punk records continues, and here he gives

us 30 tracks from five bands you've never heard of (the LP version contains 16 tracks). The Precautions formed in Portsmouth in 1979 and recorded a nine-track demo, four of which are included here. This is classic '77-style punk, all buzzsaw guitar and pacy, boxy drums. Formed in 1978, R.U.1.2 self-released a hundred copies of their punk/powerpop single She's Gone, Scottish outfit Belsen Horrors weigh in with nine demo tracks, including an amusingly ramshackle cover of Virginia Plain, and we get Ottershaw's F-Effect with their eerie, atmospheric Rave Reviews single. Finally, Roxy Club regulars The Mistakes deliver six slabs of punchy punk produced by Martin Hannett, *Shane Baldwin*

as the Magic Mushroom Band, Ozric Tentacles and Gong (and sometime Hawkwind) synth stylist Tim Blake. No two tracks by the same band, which range from out-and-out rockers to echoing electronica, noise-mongers like Praise Space Electric, the frenetic Mandragora and the cheery (it's all relative) Boris And His Bolshie Balalaika with their near-singalong Mushroom Soup. Not so much a compilation as a lifestyle lesson with an artist-by-artist overview. *Nick Dalton*

David Hepworth's Deep 70s

★★★★

Demon ED5L 0071 (4CD, 2LP)

TV talking head's personal take on an era



Former *Whistle Test* host Hepworth curates 72

“underrated songs from a misunderstood decade” for our delectation. This rifle through his record collection stops short of anything new wave but cleverly nails the essence of the bands he features by going for the less obvious options: hence Mott's I Wish I Was Your Mother, not Dudes, and Family's My Friend The Sun rather than Burlesque. The tone is more self-deprecating than his book rating 1971 “rock's golden year”, and the four themed CDs – marginally more American than UK in content – are anything but definitive. Yet this collection, also available on (abridged) double vinyl for traditionalists, will inspire many a pub or dinner-party debate, and that's undoubtedly its *raison d'être*. Job done... *Michael Heatley*

Dave Brock Presents This Was Your Future

★★★★

Cherry Red CRCDBOX 122 (3CD)

Space – with crowds of chums



Subtitled *Space Rock (And Other Psychedelics)* 1978-1998,

this 3CD set brings together more long-haired, wild-eyed acts than could cram into a muddy field for the weekend. Forty tracks unite Hawkwind – led, of course, by Brock – with their varied incarnations (Hawklords, Sonic Assassins), associates (Huw Lloyd-Langton, Michael Moorcock, Robert Calvert) and other festival-orbiting chums such

World In Slow Motion

Philly's 'constant hitmaker' hits his patient stride.

By Kevin Harley

Kurt Vile

(watch my moves)



Fiction/Verve B3485101 (CD, 2LP)

A slacker-rock Springsteen from Philadelphia, Kurt Vile has always seemed in his element in a state of baked repose, mind flickering freely through the record-store racks of his influences and otherwise. For his eighth album, Vile found himself well-positioned to double down on his default mode, and to take the time to rarefy matters. Half recorded in his new home studio OKV Central during lockdown, and half-recorded in LA with Elliott Smith producer Rob Schnapf, the result is an immersive, inviting set of beatifically zonked songs from the couch, with room left open for collaborators, covers and psychedelic colours in that tight-but-loose manner Vile has made his own.

Vile's control is key to *moves*, an album of rich, warm rewards for attentive appreciation. Whereas 2018's *Bottle It In* harboured cuts that breached the 10-minute mark, *moves* emphasises Vile's looping arrangements, droll story-songs and easygoing melodicism with song-by-song concision: while the album sprawls at 74 minutes, the individual tracks stay sharp. His homages to other artists, meanwhile, enhance the sense of an artist who knows where he's at, even when the headspace is hazy.

In two and a half minutes, *Going On A Plane Today* makes the case with a crisp, good-humoured tale of aerophobia en route to a Neil Young support slot. Tenor sax from the Sun Ra Arkestra's James Stewart takes wing in tune with a song of warm befuddlement, deftly crafted to endear and engage. Travel motifs recur in *Flyin* (Like A Fast Train), deceptively so as Vile assumes a state of tremolo-wobbled stasis – and, er, undress. "Playin' in the music room in my underwear," he coos, before a relatable pandemic-era rejoinder: "I've been bamboozled." Stewart's sax returns for the baked noodling of *Like Exploding Stones*, where Vile travels further inwards, "out of sight".

No matter how deep he goes, Vile's discipline holds. *Palace Of OKV In Reverse* is clutter-free, its

fried guitars wrapped around a shaggily Young-ian vocal like comfort blankets. On *Mount Airy Hill* (Way Gone), the self-dissolution suggested by its melting guitars comes balanced by the kind of melody that takes focused work to make sound so easy. There's brightness, too, in *Hey Like A Child*, a song as innocent-sounding as its title.

Vile's liquid guitars remain a joy throughout, but that doesn't mean even he didn't have some bummer moments during the last two years. With sympathetic vocals from Cate Le Bon, *Jesus On A Wire* issues a tender lamentation for times when faith seems to be in short supply. Elsewhere, sweet balms for the suffering unfold. On *Cool Water*, Vile honours Hank Williams, *Sons Of The Pioneers*, Marty Robbins and The Glaser Brothers, sounding out refreshing notes of gratitude for music's gifts on an album of many such grace notes. Another is *Wages Of Sin*, where Vile covers Bruce Springsteen and owns the song without audibly rousing himself from the beanbag for the job.

Dreamy closer *Stuffed Leopard* revisits Springsteen, with a reference to *Candy's Room*. "I'm just in the same place again," sings Vile, be that place his record collection or Philly homestead. Either way, (*watch my moves*) finds Vile kicking back and making full use of the time and tricks he has to hand. The result is an album both "bassackwards" and forward-thinking, familiar and fresh, dopey and well-crafted, its sometimes befuddled mindset reacting to befuddled times in the best way its maker knows how. "I don't know much for true," sings Vile on *Say The Word*, "but I do know the only word is love to see us through." On (*watch my moves*), sticking to what he knows is all the fuel Vile needs for lift-off.



Q&A

Kurt Vile on home comforts, heroes and hustles...

You recorded half the album at your new home studio. Do you feel comfortable recording that way?

It took a minute to get there. When you're focused on working you're excited about how it's going to be. When it arrives, it's not so simple to get the vibes. It's confusing, using the studio when it's time to work, and then it being your house also. It was a journey to get there but now it is laidback. I got so comfortable it took me back to when I had a day job, hustling my CDRs and recording in my bedroom, except now it's in the comfort of my basement.

You've got some great guests... How did the Cate Le Bon thing happen?

I know Cate through Stella [Mozgawa], the

drummer in Warpaint; she's played on lots of my records. Cate was always sweet when we hung out with Stella. She invited me to sing on her album *Reward*. I did a shitty version of trying to sing some back-up from the hotel room on tour but that's, like, irrelevant. When the single *Home To You* came out I was like, holy shit, this is next level. We hit it off on the road and I asked if she'd help. We recorded five or six songs; only one made this record. I keep things in the vault. They come out eventually. Or not, it doesn't matter.

Was it a thrill to have James Stewart pitch in?

I'm lucky in Philly because I live just a few blocks from the Sun Ra house. One of the last concerts I saw pre-pandemic was Sun Ra and James was blowing my mind that day. I told my manager a long time ago that I wanted to work with him and we got in touch, he turned up, he came down into the basement and we played all kinds of stuff. He's the real thing. It's amazing when you get to play with somebody that's next level.

You chose a Springsteen deep cut to cover.

What spoke to you about *Wages Of Sin*?

Wages has spoken to me since my mid-20s. Ever since I got a copy of *Tracks*. I'm 42 now. I recorded a version in 2007 and always wanted to revisit it. It's like in the country music tradition, when people hear a song and it speaks to them and it becomes their song, I feel like this is a version of that. It's deep enough that I knew I had to cover it because eventually someone else would. And people can try now but, too late, now it's mine.

There's a lot of movement metaphors on the album, plus there's the title... Are you happy to be back in motion?

I am. The title is about how I'm always hustling, Got some moves, got tricks up my sleeve, in some ways I'm competitive. Been doing it a long time, got a lot of records, these are my latest moves. On *Mount Airy Hill*, I sing, "Watch my moves/He do the snake in the grass." It's got a cocky Jerry Lee Lewis thing in there and it's about the fact that these are my latest moves. And you might want to step aside. Let me get through!

As told to Kevin Harley



Kurt Vile: the Tarzan reboot was a lot more of an indie-casual vibe

Combat Rock

Revitalized rhythm queens, refining their shining.

By Chris Roberts

Warpaint

Radiate Like This

★★★★★

Virgin/Heirloom 2438887880

(CD, LP)

It's hard to believe Warpaint's debut album emerged 12 years ago, as their nebulous, indefinable, floating grooves still feel as fresh as a field of crackerjacks. They still sound new, different, impossible to pin down. Then again, this fourth album glows with a maturity, a consummate confidence. They know what they're good at and do it very, very well – and yet perhaps even they couldn't identify or diagnose the alchemy with which they conjure up improbably fluid atmospheres – dreamy but muscular, hazy yet crystalline, enigmatically exuding more sunlight and shadow than the sum of their parts. The four women click and connect in a way so rare that theoretically you could put the four greatest musicians in the world in a room and this level of rhythmic transcendence just wouldn't happen.

It's good news, then, that they gathered in drummer Stella Mozgawa's Joshua Tree studio in 2019 and began radiating like this. But the story of this sultry treat took a twist then, as the pandemic prompted delays. Warpaint turned this to their advantage, with each member sculpting



and tweaking, at home, what they'd thought was finished, thus finding new angles and emphases. The results mean you can respond to the record as a surface groove which fills the room or as a more heady "artronica" trip, as lovely little details peep out within each track. Primarily, though, make no mistake, this is music which gets you nodding happily from Minute One, and which for all its undoubted depth slaps a beaming grin on your face. You'll dance, with a sort of arty shuffle, even if you don't dance.

It preaches positivity, albeit not in a lame, lecturing way. The songs celebrate the mountains and valleys of being alive, most effectively on Champion, which slinks along like a sleepy big cat, potentially dangerous but presently relaxed. Warpaint use latent energy as well as any band around. Champion is Warpaint in excelsis; irresistible and impish in its understated insinuations. As it sighs and smiles, "I'm a million years old, I'm a



Warpaint: someone made the mistake of leaving their new press shots next to where the kids keep their crayons

champion," it both winks with "indie" irony and dives gleefully into pop bliss. This in-the-zone mesmeric motion continues through Hips and Hard To Tell You, with that rhythm section of Mozgawa and bassist Jenny Lee Lindberg never trying too hard but always nailing it. The spaces between, what's left out, are as important here as they were for Tom Tom Club. Older listeners may also think of Warpaint as a kind of souped-up Slits, although The Au Pairs would be a cuter, more astute reference point, as would Delta 5. You'd have to refract those pioneers through a mesh of music's subsequent leaning into hip-hop and R&B, however. Warpaint hardly ever rock: they funk, languidly. Drifters like Like Sweetness and Melting showcase the less tightly wound side of the band, and nothing's sacrificed. The backing vocals on Stevie and the tick-tocking awe of Altar confirm that this is a unique unit who've arrived at a state of grace. An unmitigated joy.

Archive

Call To Arms & Angels

★★★★★

Dangervisit VISIT 21 X (2CD, 3LP)

Lengthy and capricious 12th studio release



South London collective Archive have been confounding

expectations since they formed nearly three decades ago. Inhabiting the peripheries of trip hop in the mid-90s, they've continued to evolve, becoming more progressive and eclectic with each release. Britain has been stubbornly resistant to this Radiohead-like transformation, though our neighbouring French-speaking nations love them, and Germany and Poland have been getting in on the act recently, too. Triple album *Call To Arms & Angels* is extraordinary in length and scope, addressing modern dystopian times with 15-minute epics that veer from ambient soundscapes to pulsating rockscapes, neo-soul to Heldon-like mechanised electronica, freak folk to Queen-like harmony gymnastics. It's mercurial and labyrinthine and will give their fans an almost unfathomable wealth of material to get immersed in. *Jeremy Allen*

Belle And Sebastian

A Bit Of Previous

★★★★★

Matador OLE1845 (CD, LP)

Bookish indie veterans mature in style



Long after they seemed to emerge from school textbooks'

margins, Stuart Murdoch's literate pop vets Belle And Sebastian have proven gracefully adept at navigating midlife regrets and resolve. Recorded in their native Glasgow, the group's first studio album since 2015 leans into core band virtues to find fortitude before time's passage. Between vibrant melodies and worry-lashed lyrics, *Previous* looks to companionship and melody as bulwarks, from Talk To Me Talk To Me's "ecstasy of company" to Come On Home's buoyant spritz and A World Without You's show of constancy. Sarah Martin adds a deepening, impassioned plea for female safety on Reclaim The Night, while Working Boy In New York City offers a spry summation of an album flushed with wise, wistful pop charm, sung "to the hope inside you". *Kevin Harley*

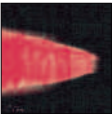
Bloc Party

Alpha Games

★★★★★

Infectious IFMC 762665.1 (CD, LP)

Newish line-up, returning happily to old moves



In the six years since previous album *Hymns* introduced a new rhythm

section, with frontman Kele Okereke and guitarist Russell Lissack the sole remaining founder members, Bloc Party have toured 2005's garlanded debut *Silent Alarm* in full. It seems to have reignited an anger in Okereke and the singer and guitarist needs his band at full power to help transmit this lyrical vitriol. Thankfully Lissack's guitars are a chainsaw assault on In Situ and the climax of the sinister The Peace Offering. The wonderfully petty Callum Is A Snake sounds like a much younger band, Louise Birtles' drums a battering ram behind Okereke's insults. The hypnotic Sex Magik is a nod to their more recent dreaminess, but the glam romp The Girls Are Fighting reflects a band reliving their adolescence in startlingly convincing fashion. *John Earls*

Blossoms

Ribbon Around The Bomb

★★★★★

EMI EMI2053 (CD/2CD, LP/2LP, Cassette)

Indie favourites pull off a concept album



Forever on tour since their self-titled debut album reached No 1

in 2016, the pandemic forced Stockport indie charmers Blossoms to take stock. Singer Tom Ogden married his partner, the sister of his bandmate Joe Donovan, and it has resulted in the concept of "The Writer", reflecting on his career. In truth, the backstory isn't needed to enjoy a collection from a band who've always seemed destined to grow old serenely. The melancholy at the core of their early singles bears fruit here. The Sulking Poet has the verve and wry worldview of Paul Simon, while orchestral melodrama *Visions* would fit on ABC's *The Lexicon Of Love*. *Ribbon Around The Bomb* is mellow while maintaining a gift for melody. Blossoms move away from sweaty floorfillers with a natural grace. *John Earls*

Boulevards

Electric Cowboy: Born In The Carolina Mud

★★★★★

New West LPNTR 2028 (CD, LP)

New adventures in rancher funk



It is hard to believe Boulevards – North Carolina soul man

Jamil Rashad's alter-ego – are already onto their third album. The psychedelic punk-funk combination of Rashad's myriad influences, while never less than at the exciting end of proficient, have so far yet to catch flame. *Electric Cowboy...* should mark a significant change for Rashad: composed and recorded with Blake Rhein, guitarist for Durand Jones & the Indications, the album initially tends toward being an overdone homage to a different era.

On repeatedly listening, it hits square – this is exceptionally well-written, sweetly delivered soul, steeped in heritage, yet with much new to add. For example, Time is just beautiful; a rolling groove, full of swooning strings, destined for summer afternoons. *Daryl Easlea*

Calexico

El Mirado

★★★★★

City Slang SLANG 50410 (CD, LP)

Tex-Mex vets expand their horizons



"Helpless and hopeless never suited me," sing Calexico, radiating expansive, restorative resilience on their 10th album. Though long since moved beyond Tex-Mex cliché, Joey Burns and John Convertino tap their roots as a source of open-skied possibility on *El Mirador*, recorded in bandmate Sergio Mendoza's Tucson studio in 2021. Whether "looking for a spot just beyond the road" or "shooting for the moon," Calexico complement their facility for drama with vivid flavours, ranged vigorously from Cumbia Del Polvo's dusty mood-song to Rancho Azul's urgent cow-punk. Guests add judicious shading, with Sam Beam's becalmed vocals softening the fraught Harness The Wind and Spain's Depredo embodying Cumbia Peninsula's cry for unity in toxic times. Between the noir-ish El Paso and romantic Constellation, *El Mirador* is a strident return: revitalised and vigorously engaged. Kevin Harley

Dan Cross

Cup Of Thrills

★★★★★

Lost For Words LFW 001 CD (CD)

Third solo album from Perfect Disaster guitarist



Cross' last album, *Atheist Anthems*, was accompanied by an expletive-pockmarked single The Paingivers and gallons of angst to boot. The angst remains intact but despite the recruitment of former Julian Cope guitarist Donald Ross Skinner, *Cup Of Thrills* is less reliant on guitar than its predecessor, Cross opting instead to bear his fangs through the bleakly pessimistic sentiments which the new funkier arrangements can't quite disguise. He can still deliver hook-filled guitar anthems (*Myself & Myself*) but is capable of conjuring up a few luminous surprises, too, such as Einstein – like The Flaming Lips giving Leonard Cohen (circa *The Future*) a theremin-garnished makeover. Johnnie Johnstone

Crows

Beware Believers

★★★★★

Bad Vibrations BADVIBES 1 V 12 (CD, LP)

Post-punks' superb second



London quartet Crows released their debut album, *Silver Tongues*, in 2019 through Bailey Records, the label started by IDLES' Joe Talbot. Crows are darker and more nuanced than Talbot's group, but frontman James Cox's vocals at times resemble the IDLES' frontman. On these 11 songs, however, that primal drone is underpinned by layers of dark, shadowy instrumentation. Take, for instance, the sublime Moderation – which sounds like a more disturbed and unstable Interpol – or the moody, film noir dramatics of Room 156, an existential narrative shimmering with both angst and indifference. Yet as loud and boisterous as this is, it's also strangely soothing. A worthy follow-up to their debut, and a fine record with to soundtrack today's doom-laden dystopia. Mischa Pearlman

Destroyer

Labyrinthitis

★★★★★

Bella Union BELLA 1293 VX (CD, LP)

Indie explorer's middling 13th



Dan Bejar's 13th album opens with the soaring It's In Your Heart Now, always ascending if never quite reaching the summit, but an immersive entry point nonetheless. It's followed by dissonant electro (Suffer), sparkling pop (All My Pretty Dresses) stately gothic moodiness with a jarring electric stampede (Tintoretto, It's For You), soporific gliding instrumentals (Labyrinthitis) and a boozy-sounding ballad (The Last Song) to finish. There's a rich seam of cynicism flowing through the album's veins, and it's chock full of sonic surprises, too, but Bejar's restlessly inventive kitchen-sink eclecticism sometimes makes for an uneven listen in the same way that 10cc albums might have bewildered listeners in the mid-70s. But there's certainly plenty to get your teeth into here. Johnnie Johnstone

Roger Eno

The Turning Year

★★★★★

Deutsche Grammophon 4862025 (CD, LP)

Sweet music for very strange times



After *Mixing Colours*, his collaboration with brother Brian, Roger Eno offers *The Turning Year*,

a rumination on modern Britain contrasting against the country of Eno's youth. It offers nostalgia, as he notes, "for a better place that no longer exists, or perhaps never existed." Occasionally supported by German String ensemble Scoring Berlin, the 14 pieces are inspired by the quiet lanes, medieval churches and waterways of Suffolk. When the strings appear – most notably on Slow Motion and Hope (The Kindness Of Strangers) – they add a perfect counterpoint to Eno's mournful piano. If Floating Points and Bremer McCoy could grab all the accolades in 2021, then the soothing, heartening tranquillity of *The Turning Year* is emotionally and stylistically on a par. Daryl Easlea

Keeley Forsyth

Limbs

★★★★★

The Leaf Label BAY 124 V (CD, LP)

Experimental wonder from Oldham singer-songwriter



The sparse yet intoxicating world inhabited by Keeley Forsyth saw the one-time actor heralded as Oldham's answer to Scott Walker after 2020 debut album *Debris* arrived as if unearthed from some barren hinterland. If anything, follow-up *Limbs* is even more extreme: with a voice pitched somewhere between that of Anohni and Moses Sumney (particularly on the exquisite Land Animal) Forsyth creates an austere landscape of unsettling leftfield abstractions – synths that drone and skulk drift in and out of focus; forbidding noises stalk tender moments. The effect is powerful, darkly beautiful and often so intense you're left holding your breath: only the strings on Nick Cave and Warren Ellis-like closer I Stand Alone offer relative light relief. Indeed, similarities to late-period Walker don't stop at the avant-garde soundscapes: *Limbs* bears scrutiny to such lofty company. Shaun Curran

King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard

Omnium Gatherum

★★★★★

KGLW KGLW-013 (CD, LP)

Sprawl good things from Oz rockers



After three albums recorded remotely, Melbourne's multi-dimensional psych-rock wizards at least partially reconvene on a record titled for the occasion. The gathering of bandmates at new studio Gizz HQ is marked in style



Roger Eno: get lost in his new "soothing, heartening" record

with The Dripping Tap, which demolishes any temptation to add the word 'Spinal' over 18 minutes of prog-jam thrash-metal frenzies. If the rest of the 16-track sprawl can't match up, it's not for want of trying. Instead of favouring one sound, the Kings adopt an all-bases pitch, hurtling from cosmic dreampop (Magenta Mountain) and astral-jazz wig-outs (Kepler 22b) to death-metal (Gaia), hip-hop (Sadie Sorceress), politicised acid-rock (Evilest Man) and off-world lounge-funk (Ambergris) with vigour. If the multi-flavoured reach verges inevitably on diffuse, that's not to knock the untethered energy and invention on long, loud show. As Persistence asserts, assuredly, "Yeah, I go the distance." Kevin Harley

Ibibio Sound Machine

Electricity

★★★★★

Merge Records MRG 765 (CD, LP)

Joyous Afrofuturism from London collective



After years of meeting each other on festival bills, Ibibio Sound Machine asked Hot Chip to produce *Electricity*, their fourth album. As a result, the creators of some of the most exciting yet sadly overlooked music of the 2010s have made their first truly great record, a joyous fusion of afrobeat and electronics. It combines the best of both groups, plus adds in *Remain In Light*, LCD Soundsystem and Fela Kuti. Eno Williams is on startling form, whether it be belting out the onomatopoeic lyrics on fierce opener Protection From Evil or singing in Ibibio on the reflective Afo Ken Doko Mien. All That You Want updates the great 80s dancefloor torch songs – think Shannon, Chaka, and Stephanie Mills. *Electricity* is utterly refreshing. Daryl Easlea

Davey Johnstone

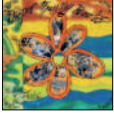
Deeper Than My Roots

★★★★★

Spirit Of The Unicorn SOUMCD 0012

Belated follow-up album to 1973 debut

As the longest-serving



continuous member of Elton John's band, Davey Johnstone has added many notable, yet subtle solos to that memorable body of work. Although Elton gained an excellent, enduring sideman, folk-rock lost a rising star – Johnstone added a tuneful, rootsy edge to Magna Carta when he joined in 1970. Despite coming 49 years after his last solo album, *Smiling Face, Deeper Than My Roots* shares many of the same values as its predecessor. It is full of impeccably played, well-crafted material such as the swooning Meu Amor, the wig-out of Deeper or the Beatle-esque psychedelia of Black Scotland. Johnstone's son, Elliot handles most of the vocals, yet Johnstone's voice sounds as affecting as it did in 1973 on the glam-stomp of Boxer In The Corner. Daryl Easlea

Taj Mahal & Ry Cooder

Get On Board

★★★★★

Nonesuch 0075597913392 (CD, LP)

Reunited and it feels so good



Showing everyone else what a proper reunion looks like, *Get On Board* sees Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder recording together for the first time since the former's self-titled solo album in 1968. The two cut their teeth as a couple of blues-obsessed teenagers in The Rising Suns, a group who were the next big thing back in '65 but had imploded by the end of the following year.

All these years later, the blues has brought the duo back together, in particular the songs of harmonica player Sonny Terry and guitarist Brownie McGhee. The 11 tracks that make up *Get On Board* are rough-hewn and life-affirming – the two guitarists are clearly having a helluva time and their enthusiasm is infectious. Let's hope for a swifter follow-up this time round. Jamie Atkins

New Albums

Picture Perfect

US singer-songwriter probes at the existential questions on best record yet. *By Shaun Curran.*

Kevin Morby

This Is A Photograph

★★★★★

Dead Oceans DOC 316 LP (CD, LP, Cassette)

Shaken by the collapse of his father, Kevin Morby began sifting through old family photographs. As he wondered how the man in the faded polaroid, captured in the prime of his life, had become so frail, the big questions were swirling through his mind: about aging, mortality, and what do we do with the time we have on earth.

The 34-year-old uses his seventh solo album to address his fears. "This is what I'll miss about being alive," he sings on the title track, a rare affirmative statement on a record that tries to make sense of uncertainty, of how families age and horizons narrow, and how time is precious.

Morby's music has always been full of longing; for lovers, for friends both present and absent, for the city and its landscape. Past albums have been paeans to New York and California; 2020's *Sundowner* saw him reconnect with his Kansas City upbringing.

After his father recovered, Morby relocated again, this time to Memphis, checking into the Peabody Hotel to work on sketches of songs as he absorbed the city's rich musical heritage: the Mississippi River where Jeff Buckley met his end; the deathplace of Jay Reatard; Graceland; Highway 61.

Kevin Morby: he'd written down the dates wrong, Glastonbury wasn't for another two months



These signposts give a view into the DNA of Morby's music,

which is steeped in American history, mined from traditional folk, indie-rock, country, garage rock and gospel. By pulling all the threads of his songwriting together like never before, *This Is A Photograph* acts as a complete snapshot of Morby the artist.

Fittingly given its title, songs on *This Is A Photograph* glisten evocatively, conjuring nostalgic feelings from vivid vignettes. His lyrics are plain-speaking, but the directness suits his true skill: breathing new life into old sounds. Produced by long-time cohort Sam Cohen across fitful New York sessions in 2021 (and a final session at Sam Phillips' Recording Co in Memphis) for the Morby connoisseur there is something of everything.

Toe-tappers come in the form of the bubblegum garage rock of Reatard tribute Rock Bottom and the folk-rock knees-up of the title track. But his

worrying is often set to beautiful music. The country twang of Bittersweet TN, a duet with fellow traveller Erin Rae ("the living took forever but the dying went quick"), and the sweet, swaying, Buckley-referencing A Coat of Butterflies, with its twinkling piano, flourishes of sax and gorgeous choir harmonies, both fret that life's hourglass runs too fast. Stop Before I Cry gets even more personal: between mournful piano chords and latent strings, Morby makes a promise to his partner, fellow musician Katie Crutchfield aka Waxahatchee, that their songs will live on even if their relationship does not.

Country-folk closer, Goodbye To Good Times, is an apposite conclusion. People age, people change, people die, but life is worth it for the little moments, like the ones his parents enjoyed: getting Micky Mantle's autograph, dancing to Tina Turner. The sentiment could be extended to *This Is A Photograph*, the definitive statement thus far from a premier talent.



Q&A

Kevin Morby on how exploring Memphis fed into his excellent latest.

Lots of records deal with loss and grief, but few actually deal with a loved one's close brush with death?

Yeah, exactly. It was an interesting thing to see my father in this weakened state, and then only a couple of hours later, come across this old photograph of him where he's the same age that I am now. It felt like a moment where you're in your early thirties and suddenly you're very much an adult. You also see how quickly someone's life goes by. I see things from a much different place now, especially compared to my twenties. There's a little

bit more perspective on everything and a knowledge that life just flies by like a jet plane.

Why did you relocate to Memphis to finish the writing process?

I had been a couple of times, and there was enough for me to be curious about it. It was a very comforting place to be, being in the presence of all those legendary ghosts. But it's kind of a forgotten city. It's almost like if you went to Hollywood or Times Square and it was abandoned. The cultural touchstones there for America are so gigantic: it's Elvis, and it's Martin Luther King, and everything in between, but it's like no one's there.

What was the Peabody Hotel like and how did writing there affect the songs?

The Peabody is amazing. I would describe it as like the Plaza Hotel of the South, but a lot cheaper.

It was really cheap because of the pandemic. I had this huge suite, that was really cool but it felt strange, almost post-apocalyptic. My usual process is embedded to the touring cycle, I'm normally against the clock. And this gave me the chance to really live inside of an idea. But a lot of it was about exploring Memphis. That's where a lot of the subject matter was able to form.

It sounds like all the threads of your songwriting really came together for this album?

Yeah, absolutely. And that was not intentional. But I was happy that it was happening. As we were going along, we kind of realised there was an element from every [past] record on the songs, that all the records were represented. And we wanted to make the best version of all the records in one record. That was the goal. And I think we did a pretty good job. *As told to Shaun Curran*

Willie Nelson

A Beautiful Life

★★★★★

Legacy 19439953562 (CD, LP)

Country rebel's on the road again



He's 89 now, yet Willie never sounds a day older, the gravelly voice still soulful, his bass-y Spanish guitar still twanging. The harmonica of long-time partner Mickey Raphael wails

and the pedal dances around the stand-up bass, creating cool country from somewhere between Austin and Nashville. It's more ballad-driven than in the days when he was a country rebel but Willie still writes a mean tune, whether the touching My Heart Was A Dancer or the twinkle in the eye of I Don't Go To Funerals, while there's a beautiful take on Leonard Cohen's Tower Of Song and a gentle reinvention of the Fab Four's With A

Little Help From My Friends that could have you waltzing around the dancefloor. *Nick Dalton*

Nik Colk Void

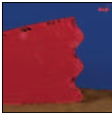
Bucked Up Space

★★★★★

Editions Mego Emego 295 (LP)

Long-awaited solo debut gouges new electronic templates (on red wax)

If electronic music too often seems to be recycling its own innovations, the first



solo album from Nik Colk Void comes as a subtly shape-shifting

milestone. Known for her atmospheric vocal, guitar and modular system excursions with Factory Floor, Carter Tutti Void and NPVR, Void's solo motivation seems driven by subjecting deceptively simple beats to intricate micro-surgery linked or topped by abstract noise ejaculations;

Interruption Is Good ostensibly lathers booting minimal techno with unsettling tweaks and dream textures, Big Breather forges a new strain of metallic future-funk dub, Demna is a mangled speed-breaks express, FlatTime a juddering monster-groove mutant. By the time Oversized's mercilessly yanked slo-mo grind is getting gouged with Void's deep guitar, the gauzy static that also splatters the set has become an

essential component in a work of (perhaps unintentionally) cinematic magnitude.
Kris Needs

Marc O

L'Homme de L'Ombre

★★★★★

Plastic Sound PSR 011CD (CD, LP)

Chansons d'amour et système économique.



Morrissey once stated that Russell Mael sang in French italics; London-based Frenchman Marc O does exactly that in his mother tongue on the strident, assured art-rock of *L'Homme de L'Ombre*. Marc Olivier is the titular man of the shadows. His debut solo album – with lyrics by author and philosopher Bruno Pons Levy – is never less than fascinating. Le Fondu Des Bas-Fonds D'Ecran is dirty glam-grunge and Le Test De La Femme A Barbe could have come from obvious reference point Serge Gainsbourg's *Histoire De Melody Nelson* – especially as guest bassist Dave Richmond played on the original album. With sleeve-notes by a senior curator at the V&A and subjects ranging from gender politics to the economic system, it is clear that *L'Homme de L'Ombre* is an important – and hugely enjoyable – work. *Daryl Easlea*

Tess Parks

And Those Who Were Seen Dancing

★★★★★

Fuzz Club FC 175 V 12 DE (CD, LP)

Hypnotic grooves from Canadian psych-rock star



Toronto singer-songwriter Tess Parks released her debut album, *Blood Hot*, in 2013, but only now has its follow-up emerged. Partly that's because Parks had been busy collaborating with The Brian Jonestown Massacre's Anton Newcombe – most recently

on their eponymous 2018 record – but also because she gave up music and turned instead to painting for a while before returning with this set of smouldering songs. Lead single Happy Birthday Forever – part trippy lament, part upbeat dance anthem – captures a happy-sad dichotomy perfectly, while Parks' smoke-filled, husky voice purrs to great effect on the brilliantly-titled Brexit At Tiffany's and I See Angels. At times, though, these hypnotic swirls of psychedelic sound lean towards affectation. While part of their charm, they overdo it at times. *Mischa Pearlman*

Pictish Trail

Island Family

★★★★★

Fire FIRELP 656 (CD, LP)

The return of an indie cult hero



For Isle-of-Eigg dwelling Johnny Lynch, who co-ran the celebrated label Fence Records until 2013 and launched a new musical output in Lost Map soon after, everything seems a wonder. This wide-eyed innocence has often informed his psychedelic one-man-band Pictish Trail. His work is never less than fascinating, and *Island Family*, his fifth album, is a tremendous example of his oeuvre. Exploring the fact that it is difficult for any man to remain an island, the album is full of melody and quirk. On the title track, when it drops to its nursery rhyme refrain about a sycamore tree over a skeletal techno beat, it illustrates how Pictish Trail are the natural successor to the Beta Band. *Island Family* really hits its stride with Melody Something – deranged mellow west coast, which dissolves into the unrelenting beat of Natural Successor, which, to use the musicologist term, grooves like a bastard. Much to enjoy. *Daryl Easlea*

Röyksopp

Profound Mysteries

★★★★★

Dog Triumph DOG 051 (CD, Cassette)

Club duo reverse their 'no more albums' policy



In the eight years since apparently signing off with *The Inevitable End*, Norwegian duo Röyksopp have soundtracked a play based on Franz Kafka and contributed to a Rick Rubin compilation. A new album began to seem inevitable. Sure enough, inspired by the mysteries of the universe, album six continues the wide-eyed sense of wonder begun on 2001's *Melody AM*. Breathe, featuring Astrid S, is as infectious a pop song as they've made, while Alison Goldfrapp and Beki Mari respectively front trance bangers Impossible and This Time, This Place. Yet the four instrumentals lack Röyksopp's usual concision, aimless rather than ambient. Not so much profound as patchy. *John Earls*

Luke Steele

Listen To The Water

★★★★★

EMI 4554545 (CD, LP)

Empire Of The Sun man's solo debut



Luke Steele is not prone to restraint: his cult-psychers The Sleepy Jackson and flamboyant EDM-conquering electro-poppers Empire Of The Sun were, musically and conceptually, very much of the more-is-more persuasion. But on his debut solo album, Steele is embracing bucolic domesticity – he recently moved his family to a remote Californian ranch – in search of something more grounded. He wears restraint well. These melodic songs, seeded from folk and country, are among the loveliest of his career (particularly *Gladiator*). But he can't help but tinker: it's easy to hear the earwormy Two Of Us as an EOTS song that's been reined in; Get Out Now is a lighters-in-the-air synth-pop ballad par excellence. By the closing quarter, as on My Boy, he often resembles something close to Hot Chip covering a Radiohead ballad. A low-key triumph. *Shaun Curran*

Stromae

Multitude

★★★★★

Universal France 4514398 (CD, LP)

Long-awaited third from reluctant Belgian superstar

Fame sucks, apparently, though eurodance chansonnier Stromae has



found it particularly tough. "Sometimes I've had suicidal thoughts and I'm not proud of it," he laments on the Jacques Brel-influenced tearjerker L'Enfer – or "hell" – while he adopts personae throughout this third album, you sense that lyric is drawn from bitter experience. The album is certainly more downbeat than 2013's *Racine Carrée*, which sold four million copies and made him the Francosphere's biggest star, though for all the navel-gazing and melodrama, *Multitude* is a mature and multilayered record that more than lives up to heightened expectations. Moreover, while always being anchored to the storytelling tradition of *les chansons françaises*, the pristine production and audacious beatmaking take pop music to thrilling, uncharted territories at times. *Jeremy Allen*

Alfie Templeman

Mellow Moon

★★★★★

Chess Club CC121 (CD, LP, Cassette)

Bedfordshire teenager continues rapid rise



Still only 19, Alfie Templeman has been working towards this full-length debut since his debut single in 2018. Initially slotting next to Declan McKenna and Jack Garratt as DIY pop enthusiasts, aided by co-writers from Jungle and The Vaccines, Templeman suddenly emerges with fabulously polished funk workouts that transcend any attempts to categorise him as indie. Various recalling Air, Jamiroquai and Basement Jaxx, *Mellow Moon* amounts to one of the best collections of summery pop in ages. Although he plays everything himself, Templeman's tightly packed songs are as crafted as modern pop's battalion of writers and producers, without losing anything in passion. His hero is Todd Rundgren. Not a bad start for trying to match his career. *John Earls*

Michelle Willis

Just One Voice

★★★★★

GroundUP GUM040821MWCD (CD)

Singer-songwriter blends studio and live recordings

Raised in Toronto and now



living in Brooklyn, British-born Michelle Willis boasts an impressive resume, having contributed her luscious vocal harmonies to albums by artists as diverse as Snarky Puppy and Iggy Pop. She's most closely associated, of course, with David Crosby, whom she's toured and recorded with. Significantly, Croz makes two telling cameo appearances on *Just One Voice*; on Janet, a passionate gospel-tinged character study, and the gently mesmeric Trigger. Other guests include Becca Stevens, Michael McDonald and Grégoire Maret but their contributions don't overshadow the sensuous-voiced Willis, whose ethereal harmonies create a shimmering vocal haze on the atmospheric 10ths and Think Well. The best two cuts are left till last; the moody Joni Mitchell-esque Black Night and the slow-burning title song, which glows with a sanctified intensity. *Charles Waring*

Wolfgang Flür

Magazine 1

★★★★★

Cherry Red SFE 096 (CD, LP)

Kraftwerk's former drummer recaptures their glory days



Wolfgang Flür is a living example of how the sci-fi far-futurism of his old group Kraftwerk's sound has finally been overtaken by time. Conceptually themed around that most analogue of thrills, a magazine (imagine!), his new record is positively 80s retro in its like/dislike treatise on consumerism Best Buy, the sophisticated, Midge Ure-aided sonic internationalism of Das Beat and the playful, off-the-wall electro of the title track. Forty years ago *Magazine 1* would have sounded thrilling and alien, but in 2022 even the welcome presence of Flür's techno acolytes Carl Cox and Juan Atkins feels like an embrace of the past. That's no bad thing, though, as demonstrated by Birmingham's to-die-for combination of Flür, Claudia Brücken and Peter Hook. This is certainly the closest we'll ever get to a new Kraftwerk record, and that is reason enough to savour its sounds. *David Pollock*

NEXT MONTH

Arcade Fire Neil Young

Charlie Mingus Porridge Radio

Everything Everything Norah Jones